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# MODERN

# FRENCH LIFE.

EDITED

BY MRS. GORE.

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IN THREE VOLUMES.

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# MODERN FRENCH LIFE.

## CHAPTER III.

The Countess de Guercy knew little of love, unless from books. Her life had passed uninfluenced by the passions; but like most women, whose conduct has been irreproachable, she entertained a few romantic ideas. Her son's confession at first astonished her, and gave her pain; but after that first impression, she observed with her usual serenity: "Be assured, Albert, that I do not wish your marriage to be a mere affair of calculation," said she. "It is because Diana is hand-



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some and amiable, that I judged her a suitable match for you; perhaps I am mistaken in supposing she prefers you. I thought so, because I wished it, and spoke without reflection; but I trust I have been precipitate."

"I hope so too, dear mother."

"You have, nevertheless, concealed something from me, Albert," replied the kind mother, in a tone of affectionate reproach. "But you must now reveal all."

"Not yet, mother, I entreat you!" cried the Count. "Let me collect myself. All may end in a cruel delusion, and I shall indeed deserve to be pitied. You think me weak and trifling, mother, do you not?"

"On the contrary, both your head and heart may be depended on. I am sure you would not deceive me in any important circumstance of your life, and that your choice is worthy of you. But I conclude I must prepare myself for your determination to leave this place?"

"On the contrary, let us remain—let us

stay here some time longer. It is here my fate must be decided."

The Countess observed that evening to her niece, "I feel ashamed of keeping you here, Diana. You would pass your time far more agreeably in Paris or London!"

"Of course I should, dear aunt!" said she heedlessly.

"In that case, I will take you back to Paris, as was my first intention. You shall spend the summer with our dear Lady Neville; and in the autumn, come back to me here."

"What means this new arrangement, dear aunt?" said Diana, with some anxiety.

"By that time," said the Countess, kissing her forehead, "your cousin will perhaps be married, and we will pass the winter together in Italy."

Pale as death, Diana fixed her eyes upon her aunt in unspeakable astonishment; but wounded pride soon predominated over her

agitation, and her face assumed its usual air of disdainful reserve.

"Is my cousin about to be married? I rejoice to hear it!" said she. "For that very reason, allow me to remain with you, my dear aunt. You must not be left alone."

"I shall be only too glad of your company, my dear child," said she, joyfully, satisfied that Diana had already stifled in her heart whatever feelings of affection she might have entertained for Albert.

"And when does this marriage take place?" inquired Diana.

"The affair is not yet sufficiently advanced to be a subject for discussion between us," replied the Countess. "Better that we should seem to know nothing about it."

"I can wait till it be officially declared," replied Diana, "and without dying of curiosity."

At that moment, the Count entered the room. Again, Diana turned pale, but she

contrived to disguise her vexation, and bitter jealousy. Even Albert saw nothing : Having crossed the room, she quietly tied the strings of her straw bonnet, smiled at herself in passing the small looking glass, and retired with the dignity of a queen. All this pride vanished, however, as soon as she reached the inn ; where, unnoticed, and unmolested, she gave vent to her grief.

Till now, she had been uncertain of her love for Albert, precisely because she felt sure of his attachment. But the shaft of jealousy having penetrated her heart, she saw how much she had deceived herself. She was eagerly anxious to learn the object of his preference ; and in her wounded pride, thought that the woman must possess unheard of advantages, who could be preferred to Diana Neville !

She accordingly reviewed in her memory the names of the great ladies and rich heiresses whom Albert had ever mentioned to her. But

her conjectures were unavailing. She felt persuaded it must have been in some German court in the course of his last tour, that he had conceived some passion, which, at first hopeless, he had kept to himself.

His sudden determination to remain at P—— confirmed her suspicions. She fancied that he was to wait for some period previously agreed upon, and that he would set off for Germany to complete his marriage; nor did she for a moment suspect the real cause of his sojourn in an obscure village in Lorraine.

Towards evening, Albert set out to visit Madame Vialart. As he approached her house, the white walls of which he could not look upon without a palpitation of the heart, he was seized with such a sensation of joy, such ardour of hope, that he trembled to perceive the whole happiness of his future life depending upon the breath of a woman.

Lucy was in her garden, and did not hear the approach of the Count. On perceiving

him, an exclamation of surprise escaped her, and she involuntarily retreated a few steps.

"Pardon me, Madam! My presence is perhaps an intrusion?"

"Far, far from it!" was her ingenuous reply.

Albert was silent, but her answer had sunk into his heart. Apparently Madame Vialart fancied he had not understood her; for she did not attempt to weaken her avowal by an explanation. Repressing her agitation, she added in the peculiar tone that imparted a charm to her most common place speeches,

"I have received, to-day, a charming letter from your mother; who has returned me the furniture she allowed me to place at her disposal. Your departure is no doubt approaching, and you are come, I fear, to take leave of me?"

"No, Madam," replied he, offering her his arm to return to the house. "On the contrary, we remain here; and for that reason, my

mother has ordered furniture from Bar-le-Duc. We have now established ourselves at the inn; and, I trust, shall pass the whole summer in Lorraine."

Madame Vialart made no reply; but turned away her head, as if trying to subdue the emotions of her heart. She proceeded, however, gently leaning upon the arm of Albert.

It was one of those bright and genial nights, which resemble the lengthened twilight of summer days. The verdure of the trees did not as yet afford sufficient shade; but the delicate foliage of spring extended itself against the deep blue sky, like a canopy of the finest lace. Already had the violets, primroses, and lilacs, put forth their fresh and cheerful flowers, while from the peach and cherry trees in blossom, exuded a cordial fragrance.

"Let us remain here, awhile," said Albert, retaining Lucy at the entrance of the hall—"the night is heavenly!"

She consented. While the Count placed him-

self almost at her feet, overcome by such profound happiness, that he feared to give it utterance. Lucy also seemed absorbed by the influence of her emotions. Her hands clasped upon her knee, she raised her eyes to heaven, as if offering a silent prayer. At this moment, Albert intuitively sympathised in her silent joy. But her past life was still an impenetrable mystery; nor dared he conjecture what trouble, or what adversity, had so prejudiced her prospects as to determine her retirement from the world.

At one moment, he fancied she pined under some disappointment of the affections—or that she had been the victim of an early love—or had survived the object of her youthful passion. Still, there prevailed a chaste expression in the physiognomy of Lucy completely belying such suppositions. It was not the influence of the passions which had furrowed her pure and noble brow, or caused the tears to flow from those soft expressive eyes.

Vainly, however, did he seek to penetrate the secret of her mysterious life. He was like one who chances upon a book of which the early chapters are lost.

Both remained some time absorbed by similar impressions; happy with the happiness of mutual love, in breathing together the same perfumed air, in the charmed solitude of a lovely night.

At length, the Count whispered in a faltering voice, "If you only knew the delightful projects I have ventured to form for the summer!"

"Projects?" she replied, trembling and agitated.

"Yes! excursions with you in yonder beautiful woods, or on the banks of the Ornain. I am beginning to indulge in the hope of days of happiness!"

Gazing steadfastly at him she exclaimed, "And next winter?"

"If you deign to permit me," replied Albert,

taking her hand, "we will spend it together."

"You love me then?" said she, shuddering—"you really love me?"

There was a pause. Lucy partly withdrew her hand, and Albert drew nearer and nearer, conscious that the moment was come when he was privileged to inquire the truth.

"Dearest Lucy," said he, "I cannot doubt that some great misfortune has embittered your life. May I trust it is not of a nature to impede our mutual happiness?"

"*It is,*" was the faltered reply of the sobbing woman.

"You have a husband then still alive?"

"I am not married. The name of Vialart was that of my mother."

At this announcement, a painful feeling of jealousy, mingled with profound compassion, assailed his heart.

"You are the victim then of some dreadful misfortune?" said he; "you have been betrayed, perhaps abandoned!"

"No," replied Lucy, with an air of dignity and truth: "no—every action of my life has been pure and stainless. I am without reproach and without remorse. But I have suffered much, and have no further happiness to hope for in this life!"

She was silent a moment, overcome by agitation; but quickly resumed,

"You are a man to be trusted," said she, "and I will tell you all. I love you. I loved you from the moment of our first interview, and yet my hopes are limited to a few days more of happy intimacy; during which, we will think neither of the past nor the future! You must then leave me—for ever—and I will live upon the remembrance which will sufficiently console me in my solitude, and afford a store of happiness for my future life. You will probbaly forget me! Yet, when happily wedded to another, sometimes think of your poor Lucy."

These words, which revealed such complete and noble confidence—such inexperience of

the passions—such spotless innocence, filled the heart of Albert at once with grief and gladness. In course of time, he hoped to gain the confidence and subdue the resolution of his lovely friend. But suddenly, a strange surmise presented itself to his mind. He remembered anecdotes on which dramas and romances have been founded, of charming persons disgraced as belonging to the families of felons or executioners. He was horror struck!

"Lucy!" said he, in a tremulous voice—"one word more! You are innocent and pure—but the name of your father was perhaps dishonoured?"

"No!" replied she, with painful emotion, "I belong to an honourable family. The memory of my father is still revered. Ask me no further questions. I can tell you no more at present!"

"Enough—enough!" exclaimed he, full of hope and confidence. "What I have heard suffices. You are free, Lucy; you have loved

no one but myself; and neither the past nor the present shall deter me from making you mine!"

"Never!" she replied, with the most energetic resolution;—"my heart may break in the trial—but never, dearest Albert, never will I become your wife!"

## CHAPTER IV.

The following day the Countess de Guercy and Diana visited Madame Vialart for the first time. Albert did not accompany them, but waited their return with intense anxiety. He dreaded the penetration of his mother in her interview with Lucy.

But the kind-hearted woman had little knowledge of human passion; and on seeing her son again, simply observed,

"I little thought we had so charming a neighbour! Really, Madame Vialart is a woman of distinguished manners, and I hope to see her often. You did not assign sufficient importance to an intercourse which promises so much that is agreeable."

Albert dared not answer. He was confused by the consciousness of having deceived his mother; and turning towards Diana inquired, "And what thinks my charming cousin of her morning visit?"

Miss Neville surveyed Albert with an expression of mistrust and mortification. "Your friend is certainly agreeable," said she, "but she has neither youth nor beauty to recommend her, and is too languishing and pedantic in her expressions for my taste. I scarcely understood her. What strange whim induces her to render so pale a face still more doleful by such a dress? Her appearance is that of a nun! I fear the lady is somewhat eccentric."

"Certainly," replied the Count, "if originality consist in exquisite grace, and being as distinguished for superiority of mind as for goodness of heart."

Diana blushed; his words had touched her pride as well as roused her susceptibility; and she now perceived with feelings of resentment

and surprise, who was the woman preferred to herself. The discovery only stimulated her to persist in her jealousy.

The Count's passion might be but a passing fancy of which he would soon grow weary, and marriage was perhaps out of the question. Notwithstanding the vehemence of her character, Diana was capable of dissimulation; nor was she deficient in acuteness of mind. She saw through the reserve of Albert as well as the blindness of the Countess, and had sufficient self-possession to appear unobservant of either. From that day Madame Vialart had an implacable and restless enemy; a rival, wounded in the two most sensitive of passions—pride and affection.

Every morning, the Count made long excursions, ending in a visit to the house of Madame Vialart, of which his mother was ignorant, and to which he never alluded. His position had changed. He was loved—he knew it; and though his happiness was uncertain, he gave

himself up madly to the influence of his passion.

Lucy began to dread these prolonged interviews. Yet in the walks she took with him every evening in the garden, her companion was always present, a precaution without which Madame Vialart would not receive the Count. The intimacy of these two women, and their mutual affection, was to Albert a source of endless wonder. Independent of their dissimilarity of character, their whole intercourse seemed replete with the most incomprehensible contradictions.

The one was resolute and submissive; the other feeble, yet preponderant. The energetic character of Eleanor yielded to the most trivial desire of Lucy; and yet these condescensions did not result from position, but the most unlimited devotion. It was the tenderness, the constant solicitude of a mother for a child in precarious health—an exclusive affection absoring all other feelings.

Lucy received this devotion with the deepest sense of gratitude; still, she evinced surprise at such complete abnegation, as if undeserving. Unconsciously the Count had conceived a kind of aversion to Madame Vialart's companion. He detested her masculine style of beauty, as well as an order of mind so devoid of grace or refinement. But in consideration of her attachment to Madame Vialart, he pardoned her want of distinction; as well as a pair of staring black eyes which expressed not only infirmity of intellect, but a certain mysterious exaltation of character, frequent in the looks of lunatics.

In this way, weeks passed on. The Countess had established herself at P., as if intending to remain there the rest of her life. She amused herself with her flowers, and her herbal was considerably enriched by the Flora of the banks of the Ornain. When unoccupied with botany, she resorted to her pencil, laid out plans, or wandered in the fields, question-

ing the peasants upon the resources of their province and their habits of life. She succeeded in establishing at P. what had never been known there, a coterie of a sociable nature. One evening, the priest and the notary took tea with her, to which Madame Vialart and her companion were also invited; and the little party lasted till midnight.

Diana would have been soon weary of this kind of life, had not her state of mind assigned importance to the most insignificant trifles, developing her instincts of coquetry. Never had she taken such pains to enhance her beauty, or shown so much ostentation in displaying her advantages, as in the little circle where she was opposed to Lucy. She felt a malicious pleasure in challenging comparisons betwixt her rosy and healthful face, and the pale and suffering features of Madame Vialart, as if for the gratification of her vengeance. But neither Albert nor Lucy heeded her manœuvres,

and she discovered, with feelings of bitter disappointment, that she had not succeeded in exciting either envy or regret.

In spite of the haughty reserve of her character, Diana now permitted the hostess of the Folly to approach her with a certain degree of familiarity. Perhaps this condescension was a matter of calculation. Perhaps she hoped to extract from Madame Babillon, information which no one else dared communicate.

One evening, Albert being at Madame Vialart's, and the Countess contemplating the treasures of her herbal, the hostess came bustling to Diana, who was alone in her room.

"You are not going out then, Mademoiselle?" said she. "The weather is charming, and the moon as bright as day."

"My aunt is not inclined to walk. With whom am I to go?" answered Miss Neville.

"If I dare, I would propose to accompany Mademoiselle. We might stroll along the

meadows as far as the White House. The road is beautiful."

"With all my heart," replied the heiress. "I shall be glad of air and exercise."

"Perhaps we may meet the Count. He generally walks towards the woods, and enjoys some three leagues of bad road. What a taste, to saunter through dirty fields, when one can go about in a comfortable carriage, on a nice smooth road, like that of Bar-le-Duc!"

They now set out, taking the high road as far as the White House, where Diana paused, and looked around her.

The moon threw a soft light over the vast meadows, watered by the Ornain, and through the lofty poplars, where the hawthorn hedge of the garden ran parallel with the high road.

"There are three persons yonder in the garden," said the hostess. "One of them must be the Count."

"Perhaps so," replied Miss Diana, motioning to the hostess to draw nearer.

"Does Mademoiselle intend to visit Madame Vialart?" said the hostess.

"Not I," replied Diana, haughtily. "I only enter the houses of my friends. In my opinion, my aunt has been rather precipitate in making this acquaintance."

"To be sure, no one knows the lady. She may turn out an adventuress," replied the officious hostess.

"I have long suspected so."

"She has, at least, plenty of money. But wherever does it come from?—marriage or inheritance? What stories flew about when she first came! A woman who is unprotected always looks suspicious. There are plenty of strange reports about her even now."

"Of what nature?"

"Some say that the Count is an old acquaintance, and is come to marry her."

"Marry her? Count Albert de Guercy marry a Madame Vialart!" cried Diana, laughing outright. "The people must be mad!

As if a young, rich, and well born man would marry an obscure and nameless stranger, who comes from Heaven knows where, and whose fortune perhaps has been realised behind a counter—perhaps much worse ! My aunt would never bear with such a connection ! She would disavow her son, rather than consent to such a marriage."

Diana had scarcely uttered these words, when she heard steps behind the hawthorn hedge, and a head suddenly thrust itself forward, and as quickly vanished.

"Who is there ?" cried the hostess, alarmed. "I certainly heard a noise !"

"A bird fluttering in the bushes," said Diana. "There is no one."

"Mademoiselle had better go home," said the hostess. "It may have been some beggar sleeping behind the hedge. Besides, there are so many dangerous persons on the high road."

At that moment, Albert made his appearance at the gate.

"Here is the Count," said the hostess "He will give you his arm."

"By no means," murmured Miss Neville, in an under voice; "not for the world!"

The Count did not even see them. An hour afterwards, Diana exclaimed, as she sat alone in her own room,

"Some one was certainly listening!—If it were only that woman, I should be satisfied."

## CHAPTER V.

When Albert returned the next day to Madame Vialart's, he found only her companion seated in the drawing-room. Eleanor's manner announced greater absence of mind than usual. Her reception of the Count was grave and embarrassed.

"Madame Vialart is unwell, Sir," said she. "I fear she cannot receive you to-day."

"It must be very sudden," said the Count, with much anxiety. "Madame Vialart seemed so well yesterday evening. I never saw her more beautiful or more animated."

"I trust her illness will be short," observed the young lady, with a profound sigh.

There was a pause. At length, the Count observed,

"It is dreadful to live in this uncertainty! Dare I depend, Mademoiselle, upon your humanity for assistance? Since my love for Lucy is of no avail, and that she has not confidence in me to concede an explanation, tell me, what are the obstacles that divide us?—On my side, Heaven knows, there are none!"

Eleanor mournfully waved her head.

"You do not believe me!" replied he, with vehemence. "Point out then the obstacle to my happiness! Does not my position warrant my following my own inclinations? One person only in the world has a right to oppose my wishes, and in this instance, I am sure of her acquiescence. Lucy is free—belongs to an honourable family, and is pure and without remorse."

"She is a saint—an angel!" cried Eleanor, in an impressive voice.

"Still, some terrible and secret woe is con-

suming her, to which she resigns herself with fortitude. But I must and will know all. My sincere attachment confers the right. You who also adore her, aid me, oh! aid me in my attempt. Deign only to tell me what affliction weighs down her existence—what fatality has embittered her destiny. On my knees, I solicit the confession! Come with me, and unite your prayers to mine; and should she persist in her cruel silence, be yourself more indulgent."

"Impossible," exclaimed the young lady, in great distress, yet still detaining Albert. "Have pity on us, I beseech you."

The Count sunk into a seat. "Why, why did I ever come to this fatal spot!" cried he, in despair.

"Why, indeed!" repeated Eleanor, weeping. "Before she knew you, Lucy was at peace. Now, she is wretched! Her lonely position fills her with alarm. She turns her eyes towards the world of which you form a

part, and thinks with despair of being once more alone. Your departure will appear like the termination of her existence. Still, you must go—she knows it, and wishes it; but she knows not yet how much she will have to suffer. At some future time, in thinking of the beautiful and brilliant women to whom you are about to return, she will experience the anguish of jealousy, and the insupportable regret of being no longer loved. It was, indeed, a fatal day that brought you to the house."

The Count rose in great agitation.

"Farewell," said he. "I will return, for I *must* see her again. Be the moment of our separation now or later, I cannot quit her thus; nor will I accept the sentence which condemns us to an eternal separation. It is not my happiness alone which is at stake, but *hers;* and she shall not condemn herself to lasting misery. I will not submit till I am made to see the justice of my sentence. Tell all this to Lucy. To-morrow, we must meet."

Eleanor made no reply, and Albert boldly repeated: "Yes, to-morrow she shall listen to me—she shall yield to my prayers."

On seeing him about to depart, Eleanor held forth her hand.

"I intreat you," said he, "join your supplications to mine." And the pressure of her hand seemed to express acquiescence.

As Albert traversed the garden, he thought he perceived Lucy at the window, with her hands raised to heaven. But the figure instantly vanished, and he only saw the shadow glide away through the transparent curtains.

On returning home, he found Diana and the hostess conversing in the room which, till lately, had served for kitchen and dining-room to the party.

"Mademoiselle may rely upon what I have just told her. To-morrow, at four—though it will be scarcely daylight."

"Is it possible?" cried Diana, with an air of satisfaction. "And are you sure that it is Madame Vialart?"

As Albert approached, the two women became silent, while Diana looked at her cousin with malicious joy.

" You were speaking of Madame Vialart," said he.

" I may have mentioned her name," she coolly replied; " I forget in reference to what."

The hostess nodded her head, as if to say, " I understand, and will say nothing."

That night, all was quiet in the inn. The Count was alone astir, resigning himself to the most distressing thoughts and painful conjectures. His heart overflowed with love and pity; but bitter misgivings mingled with his compassion. He repented not having from the first exacted the avowal of the secret that so fatally influenced his destiny. By degrees, this moral fever augmented, till he would have given worlds to have shed tears at the feet of Lucy. He imagined her, pale and dejected; like himself, a prey to wakefulness and grief. At other moments, he thought of the early

death of the unhappy, and his anxieties became redoubled. In the course of the night, he went out for the relief of fresh air, and wandered towards the dwelling of Lucy.

The sky was overclouded, and the taper summits of the poplars, agitated by the coming storm, bowed their lofty heads. Lamentable moanings seemed to fill the air ; and clouds flitting across the pale disk of the moon, scarcely allowed her light to cheer the dark and desolate scene.

A lamp flickered in Lucy's chamber ; and Albert perceived with terror, shadows passing to and fro. Something unusual was going on. The Count stationed himself under the window. It was four o'clock. Day-break was at hand, when a travelling carriage drove up, and halted before the door. The post boy smacked his whip, at which signal, the door opened. Albert immediately perceived within, preparations for departure. Entering the house unobserved, he ran up stairs to the door of Lucy's apartment, where stood the two ladies,

attired in travelling dresses. On seeing him, Eleanor uttered a half-smothered exclamation; while Lucy fell, pale and fainting, on her knees by the side of her bed.

"Why have you come hither?" cried the companion.

"You have deceived me!" he replied. "Had I deferred my visit, I should have come replete with confidence, and found her gone."

"I promised nothing," replied Eleanor; "nor has Lucy deceived you."

"The other evening, the last time I saw her," said he, wildly, "she seemed calm and happy; yet, she knew it was for the last time! I left her, full of hope, full of security. She told me she would see me on the morrow. Was not *that* deceiving me, when I was to see her no more?"

"No, no, Albert, no! I did not deceive you," exclaimed Madame Vialart, in tears. "If you only knew——"

"Lucy!" cried Eleanor, with painful emo-

tion, "allow me, I beseech you, to justify you. Yes, Sir!" said she, turning towards the Count, "Lucy had no thoughts of going. It was I who have decided her proceedings; it was necessary she should leave you. Cruel imputations had been made in your family; not by your mother, but by your cousin. The pride of Miss Neville revolted against an alliance which she regarded as degrading. A few days of delusive happiness, an intimacy as hopeless as unavailing, is all that Lucy or yourself have lost by an abrupt departure, and our position being unendurable, we resolved upon flight. To say farewell, was impossible. The pain of parting would have been too severe."

"But we will *not* part;—she *shall* not go!" exclaimed Albert, closing the door. "Listen, dear Lucy! this moment must decide our fate. I do not ask the motives of your determination, or seek to penetrate the terrible mystery which influences your life. I swear, on the contrary,

never to inquire. Keep it, as now, profoundly secret. But you have confessed yourself free. Forget the past, therefore, and from to-day, be mine!"

"You are all nobleness and generosity," cried Madame Vialart, extending her hand to Albert, "and give me courage to tell you all."

"How?" cried Eleanor, with horror.

"To tell him *all!*" deliberately repeated her friend. "I leave the rest to him and heaven, and will resign myself to their unmurmuring decree!"

## CHAPTER VI.

Lucy now motioned to the Count to come and sit by her side; while her companion, concealing her face with her hands, exclaimed: "Allow me to leave you, I have not the courage to be present at this terrible revelation."

Daylight was just penetrating the muslin curtains, while the feeble light of an expiring candle flickered upon the scene of confusion and desolation produced by the preparations for departure.

At first, Lucy seemed absorbed by painful reminiscences. She appeared to be shrinking in horror from her own recollections. At length, clasping her hands, as if in supplica-

tion, she exclaimed in a plaintive voice: "Oh! heavenly Mercy, inspire me with fortitude and courage!"

"Dearest Lucy," whispered the Count, gently taking her hand, "why this hesitation? What is there to fear, when it is to me alone you are to confide your secret? My own Lucy! towards *you*, I should find such reserve impossible. To you I should confess my errors —nay, my crimes."

Tenderly pressing his hand, Lucy now assumed in a calmer tone,

"I am about," said she, "to recount the history of my life, in order that you may understand by what direful chances of destiny I was precipitated into the abyss in which my happiness, hopes and prospects have perished.

"My birth was signalized by an irreparable misfortune—the death of my mother. My father died a few years afterwards. He was a Receiver-general in the finance department, and supposed to be wealthy. But unsuccess-

ful speculations in the public funds had effected his ruin, and he left scarcely enough to liquidate his debts.

"I was extricated from utter destitution by an affectionate maternal aunt, who adopted me as her daughter; and never did a tender and affectionate mother foster an only child with more solicitude. My aunt had formed an alliance with a man of immense wealth."

Here Lucy paused, became as pale as death, a cold dew rising upon her brow and quivering lips. She hesitated, but by a strong effort, at length resumed:

"This person was the Marquis de Placy."

On perceiving that Albert heard this name pronounced with perfect unconcern, she breathed more freely, as if relieved from intense anxiety, and continued with less restraint.

"My aunt, the Marchioness, was handsome, young, and brilliant, and of a lively, sensitive disposition. She dearly loved her husband; loved him even to jealousy, for she was not

as happy as supposed by the world. Much as my aunt wished to superintend my early years, her impaired state of health required a more genial climate during the winter months; and she, therefore, confided me to the care of a woman of well-known merit, in whose establishment my mother and herself had been brought up, and where I found all the care and affection to which I had been accustomed. Oh! Albert, I grieve, even now, to think of those early years, so calm, so replete with hope and confidence—so fostered by assiduous affection.

"My first grief was parting with my aunt, who set out for a newly acquired estate in Provence, where she was to pass two years; the physicians having advised that climate, hoping to check the pulmonary complaint which was daily wasting her constitution. It was my most fervent wish to accompany her, or to rejoin her; but I was not till the close of a year, that she granted my request. My uncle, the

Marquis de Placy, came to fetch me from Paris; and, I must confess, testified for me such paternal affection, that I loved him almost as much as my aunt. I shall ever remember our arrival at the chateau de Bés! It was on a beautiful summer evening, about ten, and my aunt came to meet us on the steps. How pale, depressed, and emaciated she was! Still, however, she was handsome and pleasing. I think I see her now advancing towards us, her long dishevelled hair having a black veil thrown carelessly over it, to keep her from the night air.

"'My child,' exclaimed she, 'my dear child, here you are at last! Never shall you quit me again!'

"'Thanks, thanks!' cried I. 'Let me be always near you—always—always!' and as I kissed her cold wan hands, I made a vow never to quit her side.

"'Alas!' she exclaimed, with a shudder, 'it little becomes me to form plans for the future.

Come, dearest child, let me conduct you to your room. Enough for me if I dare reckon upon a single morrow.'

"Supporting herself on my arm, she quitted that of the young girl who accompanied her, saying,

"'Lucy, dearest, I am cold! I feel unwell this evening.'

"The young person who accompanied us, was Eleanor, who for some months had been the companion of my aunt. I had already been warned by my uncle of her presence at the chateau, and that she was to officiate as my governess. But as he said nothing of her age or appearance, I had expected to find a person resembling my former one, who was an ugly old woman.

"On beholding her, therefore, I was struck with surprise and admiration. Eleanor was then only twenty-two years of age, and beautiful—dazzlingly beautiful.

"No sooner was my aunt alone with me in

her room, than she began to weep. I saw that she was in trouble; but, not daring to question her, knelt at her feet, weeping also, and holding her hands in mine. By degrees, she became pacified, and bad me relate to her the details of my journey. When I dwelt upon my uncle's kindness, she seemed overcome with joy.

"'So much the better, dearest Lucy. Thank Heaven, he loves *you* still!' cried she, and I began to understand her uneasiness.

"'Dearest aunt,' I exclaimed, 'he loves you also.'

"'Then why is he absent at this moment? He has not even kissed me since his return!' said she, in a bitter tone, still reclining upon my shoulder.

As she spoke, my uncle entered the room.

"'Well, Julie, you are better, I trust?' said he, ceremoniously kissing her forehead; then perceiving that she was in tears, he added, in a dry and irritated tone,

"'Evermore this doleful countenance? It is incomprehensible! Does my return produce all this pain? You would do well, Madam, to moderate your sorrows!'—

"My aunt made no reply; but by a desponding glance at her husband, signified that she was in pain. Then, rising with a sudden effort, she threw her arms around my neck, faltering,

"'Lucy, my dear child, I am dying!' and sunk into so deep a swoon, that we thought she would never revive.

"What a night!—what a dreadful night! My poor aunt, senseless in my arms, seemed about to breathe her last; while the Marquis in consternation, watched by the side of the pillow. Eleanor, seated in the corner of the room, recited the prayers for the dying; but towards morning, my aunt rallied from apparently impending death, and in a few days, my grief and anxiety subsided. Though still frail and delicate, I trusted that my poor aunt might survive some time. Still, I was awe-

struck by the surmises of those around me, which I instinctively understood. Nobody smiled in the château. All was terror and sadness.

"My aunt was in such a state of languor, that it was my inexperience alone that blinded me to her approaching end. The poor woman regretted life. Her meek and patient soul rebelled against the dread decree of Providence. She seemed to contemplate with morbid jealousy the idea that the man she most adored in the world, might survive her, and one day console himself for her loss.

"She now became capricious and impatient, and I was the only one from whom she would willingly accept attentions. How much Eleanor endured from her injustice and mine! Poor Eleanor! You, dear Albert, can judge her disposition. To a somewhat prejudiced mind, she unites a character eager and impetuous, but capable of the most unlimited devotion. My aunt recognized only her faults. She

actually hated her, and I partly shared her aversion.

"During the first days of my stay at Bés, Eleanor was neither a friend nor companion to me. I treated her with a degree of distant politeness, that rendered all intimacy impossible; and she endured it with a patience which to this day amazes me. For now that I know her proud and disinterested soul I am convinced her conduct was unbiassed by motives of calculation.

"She had not the same respect for my uncle. More than once, I detected a certain degree of contempt in her deportment towards him. With him, she displayed her haughty and resolute character; which was surprising to *me*, who was still overawed by his grave and imposing demeanour.

"Six months passed away. My aunt still lingered, and my daily avocations near her being unvarying, it seemed to me impossible that I should lose her. One morning, she was

seated near the window, enjoying the warmth of the sun, and I had just placed before her a rose tree in flower, of which she adored the perfume. On a sudden, she began to tremble from head to food, and throwing herself on the sofa, exclaimed :—

"'Call them, Lucy! Summon your uncle, I must speak with him! Alas! it is perhaps already too late.'

"The whole family hastened to her assistance. But already cold with the damps of death, she moved her lips, but could not articulate. With some effort, she offered her hand to her husband.

"'My dearest Paul,' said she; 'I have nothing to bequeath. All I have is yours! This dear child is poor, but you are a man of honour, and will restore my fortune to her. This is my last request. Accept my forgiveness. Accept this farewell embrace.'

"And having uttered these incoherent words, the Marchioness ceased to exist."

## CHAPTER VII.

While recurring to this painful event, Lucy could not suppress the powerful emotions contending in her heart. "The death of my aunt was my first misfortune!" said she. "In her, I lost the only being who was dear to me; and as I looked around me, I trembled to think that I no longer possessed a home. I was bewildered. During the first dreary days, I seemed to fancy my aunt still alive, and proceeded mechanically to her bedroom door, forgetting that some days before, she had quitted it never to return. At other times, I fancied I heard her feeble voice, which had so often waked me from my sleep; and again listened, and again in vain.

"By degrees, however, my sorrows relaxed. My first agony gave way to a passive depression, and I began to look around me. Eleanor was satisfied that time alone could assuage my sorrow, and that it must exhaust itself by its own violence. But though sympathising in my tears, Eleanor did not experience sincere regret for the death of one who had never evinced the slightest affection for her. I understood this so well, that any manifestation of grief on her part would have seemed hypocrisy. She conducted herself, however, with the most decent sense of decorum and feminine dignity. My uncle remained silent and dejected; but it was easy to perceive that he had long anticipated this eternal separation, and that the expected blow came with diminished force.

"The Marquis de Placy was still young, and had been remarkably handsome; nay, he still possessed personal advantages. Though he had attained only the age of forty-five, I am

convinced that my aunt had never considered it possible he would marry again. His adoption of me appeared a matter of course, and my aunt's fortune and his own were expected to devolve upon me. I was his nearest relative, my father being his cousin german. I bore his name, and was his heir presumptive. My prospects appeared assured, for he would not hear of my leaving him. Having attained my eighteenth year, I was about to be presented in the world; it was decided that we should proceed to Paris, when I was to preside over his household; and Eleanor was to remain our inmate, as my companion and friend.

"At the expiration of his mourning, my uncle received with noble hospitality, at the chateau of Bés, all the distinguished personages of the neighbourhood, as well as visitors from Paris. Bés is situated on the banks of the Sorgue, not far from Vaucluse, the most picturesque country in France. The chateau

dates from feudal times, with fosses, towers, and vaulted terraces. But the internal arrangements are modern, in the refined and comfortable style of the day; which graces the dwelling of the old feudal baron, like a precious jewel encased in an iron coffer. It was a magnificent residence; and I felt proud of being styled the beautiful heiress of Bés; for I was accustomed to consider all this as my future inheritance, and enjoyed this enviable position in the utmost pride and security.

"But without knowing or desiring it, I excited a general jealousy, and was accused of the caprices and vanities common to heiresses, because I seemed to enjoy, without disguise, the advantages of my position. Our neighbourhood was composed of country gentlemen living entirely upon their estates, and for the most part people who disliked the idea of neighbours richer than themselves. Not one of them entertained a courteous feeling towards me. The men thought me proud, because

they foresaw that I should not choose a husband among them; while the women despised me, because I did not disguise my surprise at their singular style of dress, and provincial manners.

"Among the persons who frequented the château, was a single woman, of good family, ugly and poor, but so insinuating and prepossessing in her manners, that in spite of her personal disadvantages, and humble position, she had a certain influence in society. She was admitted every where. Inquisitive, cunning, loquacious, of an uneasy and meddling mind, she interfered in every body's affairs, and passed her life in retailing whatever she conjectured or imagined. She enjoyed the enviable *sobriquet* of 'the Daily Advertiser.' Nevertheless, she was not advisedly mischievous; and I have fully pardoned the injury she has done me.

"A year had elapsed since the death of my aunt. Winter was set in, and my uncle already

talked of returning to Paris. His habits of life had of late varied; Bés seemed to possess little charm for him, and he made frequent excursions to Marseilles. His bearing towards myself was embarrassed and uncertain. He no longer manifested the same affection towards me; and I saw that he was in a preoccupied state of mind, of which I could not guess the origin. Poor Eleanor was also a victim of this change. My uncle, who had been uniformly kind to her, no longer treated her with courtesy, and it seemed that the presence of both of us was irksome. During the long absences of my uncle, receiving no one, we led but a dull life. He might have allowed us to accompany him once to Marseilles; which is but twenty leagues from Bés.

"Eleanor observed all this with deep regret. She attempted to remonstrate with my uncle; but he replied in so absolute and stern a tone, that she withdrew in tears.

"One evening, on Christmas eve, we were

alone in the chateau. My uncle had left us, announcing that he should not return till New year's day. We were seated by the fireside, when a knock at the door startled us, and in came the Daily Advertiser, claiming hospitality for the night.

"'Thank heaven!'—cried she, looking round her with a busy air, 'I am arrived at last! I was anxious to see you, dear young ladies, for I have not been here this month or more. What is the news here to-day? What is going on?'

"'Nothing, positively nothing!' replied Eleanor. 'We must ask *you* for news.'

"At this request, Mademoiselle de St. Luce drawing up to her full height, and resting her angular chin on her bony hand, replied in a mysterious tone, 'I have, I admit, something to relate. It is a strange affair, and but that I know the story to be authentic, I should venture to doubt. I am come from one of my relatives, just arrived from Marseilles, where they say that the Marquis de Placy is on the point

of marrying a girl of sixteen, fair as day-ligh and rich as himself.'

"'It is impossible!' cried I. 'My uncle is not so mad as to marry, at forty-five, a mere child.'

"'A man in love has not the right use of his senses,' observed the old maid. 'I am told that your uncle is no wiser than others!'

"Eleanor could not contain herself!—

"'I am convinced it is not true,' said she. 'It is a mere idle report!—Monsieur de Placy could not think of marrying again.'—

"'No,' said I, thoughtlessly. 'It shall not be. I will prevent it, if necessary.'

"These words, though an imprudent presumption, did not express a threat. The eager old maid did not seize the right sense of my expressions.

"'And how, pray,' said she, familiarly. '*how* could you interfere? If your uncle were acquainted with your intentions, perhaps he might feel offended or anxious.'

"I made no reply to this retort, and put an

end to the interview, though not to my uneasiness.

"When once more alone with Eleanor, 'There is not a shadow of probability in what she says,' said I. 'It must be a mere invention!'

"'Who knows?' she replied. 'You are not acquainted with the impetuous disposition of your uncle. You know him not as I do.—I think it far from improbable that time will confirm the rumour.'

## CHAPTER VIII.

"Some days after this, my uncle returned unexpectedly to Bés. I was alone when he arrived; Eleanor, ill and nervous, not having quitted her chamber for a week. He appeared more serious than usual, and I could with difficulty repress my painful anxiety, preoccupied as I was by the recent intimation of Mademoiselle de Saint Luce.

"My suspense was not of long duration. The Marquis took me into his study, and addressed me in a tone of determination, that admitted of no remonstrance.

"'Lucy!' said he, 'it is time I should inform you, that the projects I had formed are

changed. I am going to be married again ; but trust in the step I am about to take, to reconcile you with the prospects of your new position.'

"I remained silent, my soul harrassed and depressed; but I swear to you, Albert, that neither anger nor resentment influenced my feelings. I at once made up my mind, and replied with perfect sincerity, 'If this marriage make you happy, I shall see it with pleasure, dear uncle, and will try to deserve the friendship of your wife.'

"'You will find her very young,' said he. "But she is not the kind of girl whom a family is anxious to get rid of. I met with many difficulties, and have made many concessions. Her mother seemed alarmed by the present arrangements of my family; apprehending your reluctance to cede the control of my establishment. She consequently exacted that your position be decided, previous to signing the settlements.'

"'You wish then that I should marry!' exclaimed I, with terror.

"'I do not say that. You are only eighteen,' replied he, coldly, 'and there is no hurry. While waiting till a proper opportunity presents itself, you must return to the house in which you were brought up, accompanied by Eleanor, unless she prefer returning to her family. At all events, I shall assure her independence.'

"I now began to weep bitterly. It was not the loss of my fortune, or position in the world I regretted; but the sudden interruption of a long and continued affection. The man, who for twelve years had cherished me as his daughter, and whom I respected like a father, now forced me out of his house! Fain would I have thrown myself at his feet, and prayed for an employment, a menial one, in the house, wherein I had expected to pass my life. But pride forbad! I left him, therefore, saying that I waited his further commands, and

that, on the morrow, I should be prepared to start.

"I hastened to relate all to Eleanor, who turned pale with rage and indignation, at my disclosures.

"'I scorn his generosity!' said she, vehemently. 'I will go! But he shall learn from me that this marriage is impossible! No, it shall never be! He shall be made to see the folly of his project! He does not wish to make himself, as well as *you*, miserable. Let me speak to him, Lucy. I will go in search of him.'

"Vainly did I attempt to prevent her. Dreading that the violent temper of my uncle, and the energetic character of Eleanor might produce a scene which we should all regret, I waited the return of Eleanor, in the utmost uneasiness.—But she did not make her appearance!—I went to the door, and heard my uncle talking in an angry voice, which made me tremble. A moment afterwards, she

left the room in tears, her features expressing the greatest indignation.

"'We must leave our home!' said she. 'He has decided it. *We*, Lucy, who would have sacrificed our lives rather than have been an obstacle to his happiness.'

"At the usual dinner-hour, nobody sat down to table. Eleanor retired to her room, I remained alone. For my part, I was resigned, and made my preparations for departure. Though out of spirits, I felt neither anger nor resentment; and, unlike Eleanor, pardoned my uncle for having sought his happiness elsewhere than in our care and affection.

"About nine o'clock, the valet-de-chambre of the Marquis entered the room in which Eleanor and I were sitting, apparently full of anxiety.

"'The Marquis is unwell,' said he. 'He is, however, determined, ladies, to start for Marseilles to-night, and has ordered post horses for four o'clock.'

" ' His presence there may be indispensible,' I observed carelessly.

" ' All is arranged,' resumed the man, ' and the marriage is to take place the day after to-morrow.'

" ' We must leave this, then, to-morrow!' whispered I to Eleanor; who, without a word, rose and quitted the room.

" Soon afterwards, I myself retired, without finding sufficient courage to take leave of my uncle. In passing his door, however, I paused and forgetting the cruel indifference with which he appeared to quit me, remembered only his former love and tenderness, till my heart was ready to break at the idea of our approaching separation. I would have given worlds to embrace once more the friend I had so long looked upon as a father.

" In the dead of night, I heard a strange confusion in the passages, as of servants calling aloud for help. At length, there was a knock at my door; and my own female attendant

presented herself. 'The Marquis is worse,' said she; 'nay, I fear he is dying.'

"I flew to his room. Eleanor was already there; and dreadful was the spectacle before us. There lay my uncle, his head thrown back, his eyes open and fixed, his face livid and ghastly, while his arms were thrown about in convulsive struggles.

"'It is an attack of apoplexy,' said the valet, 'we must immediately send for assistance.'

"'Let horses be saddled,' said I, hastily, 'fly for advice!—lose not a moment. Let several of you take different directions, that we may the surer find assistance.'

"At this moment, I am satisfied that Eleanor regretted having provoked the anger of my uncle. She now stood apart, in a state of complete consternation; while I remained close to the bed of death, alternately expressing hope and fear; now alarmed,—then pacified by the invalid's apparent tranquillity, which proved to be complete insensibility. Thus

passed the night, in anguish and terror. Towards morning, my uncle breathed his last, without having uttered a word!

"I retain but an indistinct remembrance of the days that followed this painful event—so unexpected, so dreadful, that it all but destroyed me. I left the arrangement of our worldly affairs entirely to the men of business, and shut myself up with Eleanor; who, like myself, was plunged in profound stupor. When lo! this state of apathy was dispelled by the sudden arrival of the officers of justice; the attorney-general himself making the most minute and humiliating inquiries!

"In the sequel, Albert, in the sequel, I was taken into custody, accused *of having poisoned my uncle!*"—

A dreadful pause followed the utterance of these words. At length, Madame Vialart resumed:—

"You must now," said she, "dear Albert,

perceive the horror of my position. You know all."

"Proceed, dear angel," exclaimed he, falling at her feet. "*Thus* let me listen to your narrative. Your fate is, indeed, cruel, but reveals nothing that ought to estrange my affection."

"I was thrown into prison," resumed Lucy, "accused before a tribunal, and confronted with the scaffold!—What would have become of me at this direful moment, but for the devotion of Eleanor!"—

"But on what grounds rested your accusation?" cried the Count.

"Public report accused me," continued Lucy, "and various conflicting circumstances tended to justify the accusation. Mademoiselle de Saint Luce had repeated the fatal exclamation which escaped my lips on hearing the first news of my uncle's marriage; and it was interpreted in a sense which supposed the

most deliberate and wicked premeditation. Various members of the household knew that, during the long illness of my aunt, I alone possessed the key of the medicine chest, containing some most active poisons; for, like others tormented by long and painful disease, she had often recourse to the use of opium; when it was I who used to prepare the doses, and had the management of this formidable drug.

"After the demise of my aunt, the chest still remained under my care. The violent and sudden death of my uncle gave rise to a suspicion of poison; and as the event placed me in possession of the fortune which had been so nearly lost to me, the finger of public accusation pointed at *me*. At first sight, the charge seemed fraught with probability. The body of my unfortunate uncle was disinterred, and the physicians made the most contradictory reports; some declaring him dead of apoplexy, others, that they had discovered traces of poison!

" Justice, however, continued its course, and I was confined in the prison of A——. Oh! Albert; judge of my situation. A young and innocent girl, till then surrounded with love and consideration, who had lived in peace and purity in the condition assigned to her by Providence, now plunged by an unheard-of visitation, into an abyss of crime and ignominy!—

" A guiltless conscience did not at first suffice to support me, and I sunk under the weight of this dreadful accusation. In the midst of my distress, one whose devotion has never swerved, came to my assistance; the only one, alas! in the world, who did not doubt my innocence—my dear Eleanor! Could you but know her devotion!—under every trial, every sacrifice, it has supported me.

" I will not dwell, Albert, upon the terror and anguish arising from these unjust proceedings, or my appearance before my judges, and the multitude present at the trial, animated

by the most atrocious curiosity. I had neither sufficient strength nor courage to defend myself, and only answered their imputations by asserting my innocence.

"Mademoiselle de Saint Luce and many others were heard as witnesses; their vague and confused depositions lending little aid to the cause of justice. Eleanor, in her turn, appeared, and explained the various occurrences of the fatal night. One alone, the most important, could not be made sufficiently clear. Neither she nor I could account for the disappearance of a box of morphine, the existence of which in the medicine chest was attested by witnesses, as well as by my own confession.

"Alas! this box had disappeared during the first inquiries. No sooner had the suspicion of poisoning reached the chateau, that it was, probably, clandestinely withdrawn, with the best disposed view, by some imprudent friend. The women who served me were most faithfully attached; and, perhaps, one of them—but

why indulge in surmises?—the truth could never be ascertained.

"I had now sunk into a state of exhaustion, which had the appearance of indifference; and seeming impassibility condemned me only the more in public opinion. My agony was prolonged during four dreadful days, when I was acquitted, for want of proof. But the acquittal did not re-establish my fame. I remained, and must remain, for ever branded in the eyes of the world.

"I now determined to retire to some spot where my name would remain unknown, and where I could live in peace with Eleanor. I even thought of going beyond the seas; but my attachment to my native soil prevented me, and I sought a spot in France, to which I could retire for the remainder of my life. Here I hoped to have found it. This country has a soothing aspect, affording repose to the soul. Nature is calm and peaceful, and the imagination does not wander beyond its limits.

"Having taken possession of the immense

fortune which reverted to me by this sad event, all such arrangements were easy; but, as a rich heiress is usually exposed to unwelcome intrusions, I declared myself married. Here have I resided for years, in peace, if not in happiness. Lucy de Placy has ceased to exist, and Madame Vialart, the poor woman doomed to waste her existence in solitude, would fain have taken her place. The Almighty has otherwise ordered my destinies.

"Albert, my Albert, you know now the invincible barrier which separates us. Branded by a public accusation, I cannot sully by my alliance a character spotless as yours. In giving me your name, you would not redeem me, but sink ignominiously to my own degraded condition. I love you too well to allow such a proof of love and self-sacrifice. You must leave me!"

Lucy would now have risen from her seat, but Albert detained her.

"Can you suppose, dearest," cried he with

unspeakable emotions of pity, devotion, and passion, "can you suppose my affection so weak as to flinch from the unjust destiny to which you have fallen a sacrifice? Can you suppose I will abandon you, when I feel certain of your love; or coldly sacrifice you to I know not what scruples or chimeras? Your secret is still sacred in this neighbourhood, since I only am acquainted with it. You may easily re-establish yourself in your true position in the world. You have just said that Lucy de Placy exists no longer. It is to Madame Vialart that I shall give my hand!"

"But your mother, Albert," exclaimed Lucy.

"She would know nothing till she loved you enough to do you justice. Forget the past, my beloved, and date your life from the day of your arrival here. Lucy—Lucy!—days of happiness are in store for you."

"You little know," said she, "how happy I am already."

As they sat forming delicious projects for the future, the sun began to shed luminous gleams along the curtains, and irradiate with a golden hue the animated features of Lucy. Suddenly, a sound was heard at the door, and Eleanor made her appearance.

"Let me not become ungrateful in my happiness," cried Lucy. "Dear Eleanor, so faithful to me in my days of adversity, thank heaven in my behalf, for vouchsafing me far more than it ever took away."

In the course of the day, Albert acquainted his mother with his choice. The old lady, inquiring into nothing, thought it the most natural thing in the world that her son should marry a beautiful young woman, with millions for her dowry. Even when she made some inquiries as to her birth, and Albert replied that she belonged to a respectable family, the Countess was fully satisfied.

"It is of little consequence," said she. "She will renounce her own name when she becomes your wife."

Miss Diana and the hostess of the "Folly," had the satisfaction of learning the news which was causing such sensation in the village of P——.

"Here is an event, forsooth!" cried Madame Babillon; "I told you, Mademoiselle, something would come out in the end. The Count and Madame Vialart have known each other for some time past, I warrant."

"I tell you, *no!*" vehemently interrupted Miss Diana. "The supposition is absurd. How could my cousin have possibly met such a woman? It is mere chance that has brought it about."

"Chance, and the whims of Mademoiselle!" replied the hostess, with a cunning look. "If you had not wanted lamps, arm-chairs and carpets, I should not have borrowed them of Madame Vialart, the Count would not have gone to thank her, and most probably, not have married her at all."

"What signifies the origin of the evil?" cried Diana, unable to contain herself. "Suffice it,

that the marriage is a disgrace to our family. What will they say in the world, when my cousin presents his wife; and the Count de Guercy, after having visited all the principal cities and courts of Europe, and seen all the handsomest and richest heiresses, marries an obscure inhabitant of a village in Lorraine! I am told she belongs to a respectable family, a fact my aunt communicated to me with her accustomed indifference. Who can swear we are not deceived, for no one knows her here? Why and wherefore came she to this place? —There is certainly some mystery in the affair!"

"Indeed I cannot guess, nor can anybody at P—," replied the hostess. "As Madame Vialart receives no letters, one cannot see by the postmark with whom she is in communication. Some time ago, an elderly lady, changing horses here, inquired if there were not two ladies, whom she described, living in the country. She made many inquiries, and probably

knew Madame Vialart. But she had not time to stay and visit her."

"Ah!" said Diana, "if she would only return!—The mystery might then be unravelled."

## CHAPTER IX.

When after having submitted to a long course of affliction, and yielding to the weight of despair, better days succeed, the human soul views with mistrust the approach of happiness, and the smiles of the world create as much alarm as enjoyment. Deeply conscious of this, Lucy listened with fear and trembling to the seductive hopes that thrilled the heart of Albert. The marriage was to be celebrated at P——, in the charming retreat where she thought to end her existence; after which, they were to travel for several years.

Diana witnessed these arrangements with apparent calmness and indifference. Her pride forced her to dissemble; but in her soul, she

writhed under the torments of a jealous hatred, of which Albert now was the object. Her excessive sensibility had been keenly wounded, both in her pride and the consciousness of mental superiority;—nor could she pardon the woman whose humble advantages had been estimated above her higher order of beauty.—That the obscure Madame Vialart should be preferred to Miss Diana Neville, the noble heiress whose first appearance in the world had been greeted with such acclamations, was not to be endured.

One day, the Count and his mother being with Madame Vialart, the hostess ran with the wildest glee into the room in which Miss Diana sat at work.

"News, news, Mademoiselle!" cried she. "An old lady has just stepped out of the Nancy diligence, inquiring in all directions for Madame Vialart, Mademoiselle de Placy, as she calls her. Martine was going to conduct her to the house, but I stopped her. If Ma-

demoiselle would only come down—as if by chance."

Meanwhile, the old maid, Mademoiselle de Saint Luce, had remained in the dining-room, and was making inquiries of the servants, fancying she might have been misled by wrong instructions. Advancing straight to Miss Diana, she addressed her in her usual reedy voice.

"My pretty young lady," cried she, "can you tell me, pray, whereabouts two strange ladies reside, who have been in this country these four years past?"—

"I know a lady, a Madame Lucy Vialart, and a companion of the name of Eleanor?"—replied Diana.

"Exactly, exactly!" cried the old maid. "But why call herself Vialart?—Is Lucy married?"

"She must be a widow," replied Miss Neville, "for she is on the point of giving her hand to the Count de Guercy—an honour she

could have little dreamed of, under all the circumstances."

Fancying that a knowledge of the past was implied by these words, the old maid thought Diana must know all.

"Ay, ay! I see what you mean!" said she, dipping her fingers into her snuff-box, and fixing her cat's eyes on the stranger, to watch the effect of the words she was about to utter. "Nobody is better informed on the subject than myself! I was in the habit of visiting the Château de Bés, and quite at home there. The poor dear Marquis de Placy was so fond of me! It was there I became acquainted with Mademoiselle Lucy, and knew all that passed in the house. It was I, in fact, who heard—but I must not mention that! For I was a witness in that business, and it is probably my deposition that saved the life of Mademoiselle de Placy."

"The life?"—exclaimed Miss Diana, with an air of wonder and horror.

"I even fainted dead after the trial! Just imagine, Mademoiselle, what a spectacle! A girl of eighteen accused of poisoning her own uncle! And then, the judges, the jury, and the lawyers in their black robes, and the populace crying without for vengeance on the murderess—for so they called her! It was a dreadful scene. But innocence triumphed. She was unanimously acquitted. All right-thinking people now respect her, and I do not fear to speak to her. I had some trouble to find her out. But her man of business informed me she had purchased an estate in Lorraine; and one of my nephews having been appointed receiver general in the department of the Meuse, I became his security; and recollecting Lucy and her immense fortune, am come to request the loan of thirty thousand francs. Such is my errand; I do not care who knows it.—Thank Heaven, there is no mystery in *my* affairs!"

During this tornado of words, Diana sat

breathless, her looks announcing the most eager attention. Behind her, stood the hostess, listening with a vacant stare—her roast turkey, meanwhile, scorching on the spit.

"But are you sure, Madam, that you are not mistaken?" said Miss Neville, having regained her breath. "Are you *sure* that the young lady accused of poisoning is this same Madame Vialart?"

"I will soon go, and bring back my proofs," replied the old maid, furious that her veracity should be questioned.

"Allow me to accompany you," said Diana, politely.

"And I too!" cried the hostess. "What a fine story all this would make for the play-actors!"

The little circle of Madame Vialart had, on that day, been joined by the parish priest of P——; and they sat talking cheerfully round a crackling fire, autumn having already set in.

The Count and poor Lucy were luxuriating

in the prospects of their proposed Italian tour, and enlarging upon the care with which they intended to visit the monuments enriching that country, and the years that would pass previous to their return ; while the Countess de Guercy was engaged in discussion with the priest upon toleration and other serious matters, and Eleanor sat apart working as usual in the window.

On a sudden, the door was flung open, and the servant announced, " Mademoiselle Agathe de Saint Luce, and Miss Diana Neville."

Instantly overcome by a nervous trembling, Lucy arose ; but her strength failed her, and she fell to the ground ejaculating—" Albert, I am lost !"—

Though himself pale and trembling, he flew to her support, while Eleanor uttered piercing shrieks for help. The Countess de Guercy meanwhile sat astounded by the incomprehensible scene.

" What joy to see you once again !" exclaimed the old maid, advancing towards Eleanor

with open arms. But on perceiving the cool amazement with which she was received, she added,

"Do I disturb you, Mademoiselle? If so, I will instantly withdraw."

"Not yet, Madam," said Diana, detaining her. "You must repeat before the Countess de Guercy and her son, what you have just related to me. You must declare the real name of this woman, who calls herself Madame Vialart."

"What am I to say? I know nothing—I will repeat nothing!" exclaimed the old maid, retiring towards the door in dismay.

Diana eyed her with contempt.

"You are afraid, then?" said she, "afraid to utter the truth! It is I then who will speak. Count Albert, the woman to whom you are about to give your name, has been openly accused of a crime that might have sent her to the scaffold! She has passed through the ordeal of a court of justice!"

"I know it!" said the Count, fixing upon Miss Diana a look that caused her to turn pale. Then, advancing towards the Countess, he added,

"Pardon me, dear mother, for wanting confidence in you, or doubting your nobleness of soul, and sense of justice, so far as to have concealed from you the unjust affliction of an innocent life. Dear mother, you now know all. Come, come, my Lucy! Between our hearts shall be your refuge for evermore!"

"I need no explanation to believe in your innocence, my poor child," said the Countess. "I know you to be pure and irreproachable, and have courage to decide for myself."

In a moment, poor Lucy was at the feet of the Countess.

"Thanks—thanks!" cried she, overcome by feelings of unspeakable gratitude; "thanks, dearest of friends! Your words will remain a source of constant consolation to my heart. But deeply as I am indebted to your gene-

rosity—to your attachment to Albert and myself—I cannot accept the sacrifice you would make. My determination is irrevocably fixed. Never will I marry Monsieur de Guercy. The revelation which has taken place, unseals my eyes. Let this be the sad moment of our parting—of our last farewell!"

"Lucy—Lucy! it is impossible!" exclaimed the Count.

"Let us not exhaust our fortitude in an useless struggle," resumed Lucy, mildly; "but bow to the inexorable law of fate. I neither doubt your love nor devotion; I know you would sacrifice your position in life, and the consideration that surrounds you; but such sacrifices would overwhelm me with remorse. The woman to whom you give your name, must be beyond blame or suspicion, and *I* am eternally branded! No, Albert, nothing can redeem me. We must part!"

She rose—gazing wildly around her, as if

to seek the accustomed support in her hour of adversity.

" Eleanor !" faltered she ; " my poor, faithful Eleanor !"

" I am here," replied her companion, appearing at the threshold of the door.

No one had noted her absence during the interview of Lucy with the Count. But now, turning towards the spectators of this harrowing scene—" There must be witnesses to what I am about to divulge," said she, in a broken voice. " My declaration must be public. Admit every one in the house !"

Then, turning towards the priest, " Sir," said she, more solemnly; " I intreat you to receive the confessions of a dying woman."

A look of anxiety was visible in all their faces. Every eye was fixed upon Eleanor, whose face was becoming of livid and death-like paleness, while her body was universally convulsed. Throwing herself upon her knees, in the attitude of a person receiving sentence of death :—

"I declare, before God and those present," said she, in a firmer voice, "that Lucy is innocent of the crime of which she was accused. It was I who poisoned the Marquis de Placy!"

Lucy started back in horror. A faint murmur was audible in the little assembly; after which, all was silent, save the oppressed respiration of the spectators.

"Yes," exclaimed Eleanor, "I poisoned him, as the reward of his perfidy, and the consequence of my own frailty; for, during the life-time of his wife, he had solemnly pledged himself to become my husband. Yet I had not courage to yield myself up to justice. Had Lucy been condemned, I swear by all that is holy, she should not have gone to the scaffold! Pardon me, therefore, in this dreadful hour, my dear unhappy friend! To-day, I have wrought a work of expiation. Your happiness required that I should forfeit my life—I have given it you. Grant me, dear Lucy, in return,

grant me—for the last time—your hand in token of pardon and peace!"

Scarcely had the miserable woman pronounced these words, when she was seized with frightful convulsions; and when laid on the bed, Lucy stood over her, weeping, and exclaiming—

"I do—I *do* pardon you! May God pardon you as I do. But, alas! who is to save you from the retribution of human justice?"

"*Death!*" replied the criminal, in a hollow voice. "The same hand—the same means which destroyed the Marquis de Placy, have secured me from the scaffold."

* * * * * *

Even now, so many years after the afflicting events described in the foregoing narrative, it is grievous to reflect that a union so happy as that of the young Count and Countess de Guercy, should have had its origin in a catastrophe so appalling, May the blamelessness of their lives be accepted in atonement of the

double crime of the unfortunate Eleanor, whose life and death afford a lesson to all who are prompt in pointing the finger of scorn upon persons on whom the precipitation of human judgment has affixed an unjust STIGMA.

# MATRIMONIAL POLICE.

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## CHAPTER I.

Set a thief to catch a thief?

Among the guests present at the ball of Madame de Gabriel, on the last Thursday of the carnival of 1835, was a gentleman in his forty-sixth year, in whom this maturity had not sufficed to extinguish the youthful delusions of the heart. After beginning life as page to the Emperor, he had become a private secretary and prefect under the Bourbons; till at length, retiring to the *otium cum dignitate* of private life, at the revolution of 1830,

the Baron de Livernais supported the reverses of his official career with a degree of philosophy, arising, perhaps, from an income of thirty thousand francs per annum.

Compelled to relinquish the self-importance of office, he sought compensation in the pleasures of society; and quitted the country for Paris, the only stage on which a man who condemns himself to the career of fashion, can find sufficient scope for his talents.

At the epoch when Monsieur de Livernais came to this determination, he had twice numbered his years of discretion ; and after firmly resolving never to grow older, at least in appearance, had kept his word. As is usual with thin men, his shape was little impaired ; his eyes retained their vivacity, and his teeth and hair seemed little disposed to exchange their colours, as usually occurs at the approach of the fiftieth year. The Baron might, in fact, still be cited as a good-looking man, of distinguished air and elegant manners ; and his

renown, as a conqueror, echoing by the trumpet of scandal, appeared to those who saw him for the first time, far from apocryphal.

Monsieur de Livernais was too tenacious of his fame as a lady-killer, ever to lose sight of the pretension. Affixing value to every species of conquest, he did not despise the vulgar triumphs of a man of fashion, and danced and waltzed with the enthusiasm of a schoolboy; placing his chief vanity in his lightness and elasticity as a performer of the then fashionable galop.

One night, contrary to his custom, the Baron had not thought proper to offer his indefatigable efforts to the criticisms of less alert spectators. Some mysterious emotion, more powerful than even vanity, suggested this momentary self-denial. Stationing himself at the angle of a quadrille, he stood watching with close attention two of those episodes which sometimes vary the monotony of ball-rooms, and contain the germ of a romance.

Observant to the right and left, the Baron was careful to conceal the powerful impressions he was receiving on both sides.

The first object of his scrutiny was a lady dancing in the quadrille near which he stood, about twenty years of age, who would have been proclaimed queen of the ball, were it still the custom to proclaim the sovereignty of grace and beauty. Her person and demeanour merited the most unqualified admiration, exacting the suffrage of the artist no less than of the man of the world. In her dress, though of the most enchanting elegance, a single object was within reach of criticism; a garland of oak leaves, picturesquely interwoven in her black hair, of which the green diadem seemed to enhance its velvet lustre.

This druidical head-dress produced the effect anticipated by the deviser A dozen times since she had entered the ball, had the words, "'Tis Norma!" struck her ear; and

she was right in considering them a just and deep-felt homage to her beauty.

The partner of this lovely woman was young, but fat and under sized; in compensation for which physical defects, he possessed a most expressive smile—a sure indication of intellectual superiority. He was as admirable a talker, in fact, as he was a wretched dancer; and to figure in a quadrille, must have had some powerful incentive, sufficiently evident, perhaps, in the person of the lady by his side.

Fixed behind this remarkable couple, Monsieur de Livernais stood listening attentively, but with his eyes directed elsewhere. In spite of the Baron's affected air of indifference, the fat partner was on the alert. Aware that a third person, though silent, may be troublesome, he looked at the intruder with an air of defiance, and resumed the conversation in English the fair one replying in the same language, regardless of the intimate nature of the concession. In the world, an acquaintance

with foreign languages is only too favourable to dangerous confidences, which accounts for our modern predilection for that branch of study.

Educated under the Republic, by halves, or rather by quarters, the Baron bit his lips on finding himself thus distanced; and as it was useless to listen longer, his attention directed itself towards another episode, passing at a short distance.

The principal personage in the second scene, was one of those lanky youths, who affect intensity of physiognomy, and emulate in the profusion of their locks, Samson of Nazarene; trusting to their sallowness of complexion to create a profound interest.

The hero in question, was seated at the extremity of a vacant bench, with the air of a man meditating some direful crime. The ladies who had been originally placed at that end of the room, being young and pretty, not one of them had been reduced to that mortifying

inaction. All were dancing, and most of them had left some object to mark their respective places; one, her nosegay—another, a fan—the third, her handkerchief.

Upon one of the latter, the pallid Adonis fixed his eyes in tender contemplation, after having gazed around him with an air of mistrust and hesitation. At length, persuaded that, masked as he was by one side of the quadrille, he must be free from observation, he was emboldened to perpetrate his projected iniquity. Stealing along the bench till he reached the handkerchief, he dexterously insinuated a letter into one of its embroidered corners; then replaced it in the precise spot where he had found it, and departed as he came.

Having resumed his place, he wiped his brows, moist from the strenuous efforts he had made, and again looked wildly around him. There was nothing to warrant such agitation. Some of the people near him were dancing, others talking. Nobody heeded him. Con-

vinced, at last, that no human eye had witnessed his audacious proceeding, he was waiting patiently the result, when a hand tapped him on the shoulder. The pale young man started, and turning round, found himself confronted with Monsieur de Livernais, who had threaded his way among the dancers, the better to attain his victim."

"Monsieur Regnier," said the Baron, "Madame de Gabriel wishes to speak to you. You will find her in the red drawing-room.

The young delinquent of the shaggy mane, fearing to awaken suspicions by a moment's hesitation in acquiescing in the request made in such formal and urgent terms, quitted the room; having taken a lingering look at the depository of his secret, confided it to the merciful divinities who preside over the destinies of the tender passion.

Shortly after his departure, the quadrille was finished. The Baron took advantage of the confusion to glide along the bench, as if to

make way for the ladies; but suddenly dropping his hat, in picking it up, he artfully seized the handkerchief which he concealed in the crown. Having accomplished this feat of legerdemain, he went his way with a degree of unconcern to have been envied by a professional thief.

Immediately afterwards, the lady to whom we have alluded, returned to the scene of petty larceny. Her first impulse was to seek her handkerchief. But she searched in vain, and vainly inquired of her neighbours. No one could give her the slightest information on the subject.—It was gone!

"There must be dishonest people, then, at Madame de Gabriel's?" said she to her partner, who had reconducted her back to her place.

"There are dishonest people everywhere," replied the fat gentleman. "The other day, they robbed me of my purse in the lobby of the Opera."

"A purse, I can understand; but of what

use is an embroidered handkerchief to a thief?"

"It might be of some value, had he sense enough to address himself to *me*," replied the gentleman.

"Do you think he will?" inquired the lady, smiling.

"I doubt it, if you are of a contrary opinion."

"You think, then, that I am acquainted with the guilty person?" demanded the lady, in the tone with which women, in defiance of the dictionary, confer a flattering sense upon the word guilty.

The pursy partner remarked the expression with some vexation. Conscious that by persisting, he might assign importance, possibly interest, to an act hazarded by one of his rivals, he adroitly turned the conversation; and in the interim, Monsieur de Livernais quitted the room, near the door of which he encountered young Regnier.

"You were mistaken, Sir," said the young man. "Madame de Gabriel had nothing to say to me."

"Indeed!" replied the Baron. "I conclude I made a mistake."

And with a smiling bow, he passed on.

It is not unusual in ball-rooms for little billets, more or less ingeniously folded, to find their way to their address, postage free; an abuse for which the postmaster-general has as yet found no remedy; and there are readers who evince no disinclination to learn the contents of missives conveyed through this illegal channel, but receive them with delight, conceal them with care, and read them with caution. Even men, though by nature more prudent than the fairer sex, are as easily beguiled. If, at the end of a quadrille, you see a happy mortal with beaming eyes and preoccupied air, steal out of the ball-room, seek the least frequented part of the room, take up a book from the table, and turning over the leaves, sit down

in a corner so as not to be overlooked, be sure that the revenue has been defrauded to the amount of a two-penny postage.

The favourite study for perusing such billets, is the quiet whist-room, a region closed against scandal and curiosity;—for whist-players are men of a serious turn of mind, looking no further than their cards, for whom, so long as the rubber lasts, there is no world beyond the deal.

To this tranquil spot, Monsieur de Livernais directed his steps. Seating himself in an arm-chair, he carefully unfolded the momentous handkerchief, and without confusion or remorse, read the note spread out in the palm of his hand. During the perusal, his lips expressed a scornful sneer, which he was about to recommence, when he was suddenly accosted by one of the whist-players, who had just risen from his rubber.

The individual in question, was a man about thirty years of age, whose careless style of dress

evinced a total disregard to the personal pretensions of all votaries of fashion. The pensive manner in which he inclined his head, rendered his fine open forehead still more prominent. His eyes had that feverish and vague look, often the result of excess of intellectual labour; and the dense circle surrounding his eyes, had evidently a higher source than dissipation and pleasure. This pale and meditative face announced the martyr of art or science; who, in the strife and thirst of a glorious ambition, sinks under the influence of his idol, as Jacob trembled in the arms of the angel, but summoned fresh energy to renew the combat, till it ended in death or victory.

"What are you reading there?" said the stranger to the Baron, earnestly surveying him.

"Something curious, and likely to interest *you*," replied Monsieur de Livernais, regardless of the interruption. "Promise to keep your

temper, and I will read you one of the most amusing declarations of love you can possibly imagine."

"Addressed to *you?*" inquired the whist-player.

"Those addressed to myself, I keep to myself," said the Baron, with a smile of ineffable self-sufficiency.

"Then why hesitate?"

"Because, had I done what was right, I ought to have made over this letter to you without reading it. But the demon of curiosity prevailed. I could not resist the temptation of beholding a specimen of a modern love-letter; and most diverting it is, upon my honour!"

"But what have I to do with the letter?"

"Behold, my dear Colonge!" said the Baron, exhibiting the treacherous handkerchief.

"That handkerchief belongs to my wife," said Colonge, calmly examining it.

"I was not sure whether you would recognise it," replied the Baron. "You have so

little of the Othello in you! I congratulate you on your quick-sightedness. And now, give me your attention."

The Baron proceeded to relate the audacious adventure of the pale young man, whose conduct he burlesqued, with some skill in mimicry; terminating his recital by giving up the letter he had intercepted.

In spite of its diminutive dimensions, the manuscript represented the value of ten pages octavo. So minute was the writing, that to decipher it rapidly, required the eye of a woman or a jealous man. It included all the ingredients usually contained in such performances, when literary pretensions, on the part of the writer, are united to the poetical exaggeration of youth. Stars dazzled, and angels flapped their wings in every line; while Æolian harps vibrated to the fragrant breeze of the evening twilight.

As usual, he enlarged upon the inappreciable treasures of the heart of man, in depositing

so inestimable a treasure at the feet of his idol; and in conclusion, Monsieur Felicien Regnier, the unknown and embryo Dante, undertook, on the shortest notice, to achieve a name equal to either Petrarch or Byron, provided Madame Colonge consented to become his Laura or Haidee. His letter, in short, was in the usual florid style of youthful authorship, which possesses considerable charm for milliners' apprentices, promoted to the rank of divinities.

"Well, what say you to these proceedings?" inquired the Baron, of the husband, whose wife Monsieur Felicien Regnier had selected for his Haidee. "Can you imagine audacity more unprincipled than the pretensions of this foolish boy?"

## CHAPTER II.

INSTEAD of replying to the Baron, Colong put his wife's handkerchief coolly into one pocket, and the letter of Felicien Regnier into another, apparently absorbed in reflection.

"The cares of matrimonial life, are, perhaps, the bitterest cares of any!" said he, after a pause. "To be the owner of such a treasure as a young and lovely woman, is to be a prey to constant anxiety. His vexations are never ending—still beginning. His life is an endless struggle. He must expect neither pity nor courtesy from enemies ever on the watch to attack him; but fritter away his mind in absurd alarms. I, for instance, who for these two

months past, have been working fifteen hours a day in my anxiety to finish my picture for the exhibition, (and it is no trifling task to cover a canvass twenty-eight feet by twenty!) I, who to-day have not dined, and only quitted the easel to dress and come to the ball, at this moment, am molested to a degree that is bringing on a feverish attack. I am so dizzy, that every thing around me seems to vibrate. Just now, I fell asleep at whist. I have certainly a right to some repose. But no!—No repose for an anxious husband! If it suit some idle fool to address my pretty wife in the language of gallantry, I must defend myself, and take up the gauntlet thrown down, or the finger of ridicule will be directed against me! What a destiny!"

"Excellent!" exclaimed Monsieur de Livernais, laughing. "Pity yourself, I entreat you, to be married to one of the most beautiful women in Paris, in whom you do not choose others to see the same perfection as yourself. My dear

fellow, a wise husband certain of his wife's affections, triumphs in her success."

"In that case, I am anything but wise," retorted the artist, "and cannot reform my nature."

"But habit is second nature, and you will become accustomed to the universal admiration commanded by Madame Colonge. Remember, this is the ninth victim since the beginning of the winter."

"Seven, we said, the day before yesterday," replied Colonge, calmly; "counting that little ape, Regnier, it only makes the eighth."

"And your friend La Berthonie, the ninth," added the Baron, smiling maliciously. "Believe me, I am right."

"La Berthonie, too?" exclaimed Colonge, with an air of doubt and vexation.

"Yes, my dear fellow, poor stuffy La Berthonie, whom you regard as the truest of your friends, because he goes about proclaiming you the first colourist of the day, and protests that

all others compared with *you* are mere daubers; in return for which eulogiums, he presumes to adore your wife. On her account, he has even recommenced dancing; and lest one should overhear their conversation, forsooth addresses her in English."

"La Berthonie, too!" repeated the husband with an air of despondency.

"*Tu quoque Brute?* Yes! the thing is certain. Of the nine admirers we just now counted, he appears to me the most dangerous—if there *could* be danger in the case of an angel of purity such as Madame Colonge."

"I see they will not give me time to finish my picture!" said the hapless artist. "In spite of my forbearance, I shall be forced to send a bullet through one of their heads, that others may learn how to behave themselves."

"My good Sir, you are mad!" said the Baron, "I have already told you so. A man like you, full of promise and talent, risk his

life against such automata? Fie, fie! In such an act of rashness, there is everything to lose and nothing to gain. Should you fall, what a loss to the arts! If, on the contrary, you resent the silly presumption of one of these imaginary Lovelaces, your task were endless."

"No matter!"

"It would be the history of the Lernian hydra. Trust me, pacific measures are the best. Lay aside your sanguinary intentions, and I will continue your faithful and vigilant protector. You cannot, I imagine, be dissatisfied with *my* services?"

"Far from it," replied Colonge eagerly, "I know not how to express my gratitude."

"It is I who ought to be grateful, for an opportunity of rendering service to a friend, and at the same time, amusing *myself*."

"The thing amuses you, then?"

"Prodigiously! I cannot describe to you how much it diverts me. There is something so original in taking the husband's part."

"Perhaps, for the first time in your life?" observed the painter, attempting a smile.

"*Perhaps!*" replied Livernais, with an air of self-conceit; "and it is that which amuses me. But at fifty, one cannot do better than make amends for one's former indiscretions by serving the cause of morality. Do not think, however, that I would act by *every* one as I have done with you. But you are above the ordinary level of married men; as warm in heart as brilliant in head; and since not one of these conceited coxcombs is worthy to enter the lists with you, I declare war against them, all."

"May such noble conduct be, sooner or later, amply recompensed," replied Colonge, gravely.

"It is, already. Do you count for nothing the pleasure of seeing those irresistible young gentlemen, who make their appearance in the field, with their noses in the air, sneak away,

with drooping tails and falling ears? Can you not picture this to yourself?"

"I seem to see nothing!" replied Colonge, with a fretful air.

"Do not reproach yourself," said the Baron; "it cannot well be otherwise. Constantly employed upon a work which engrosses all your faculties, how are you to bring into the world that freedom of mind, that calm imagination, yet wakeful eye, so requisite for observation? With your gigantic combat of the Cimbri in your head, it is impossible you follow the manœuvres of the Lilliputian army hovering round Madame Colonge; whereas lounging and idling constitute *my* vocation. Unable, like yourself, to devote myself to great things, I must content myself with small. Trust to me, therefore, as your substitute. If *you* see nothing, nothing shall escape *me*. I am an old stager, fit only for the post of observation, where I am at home and can even detect a lover before he is aware of being in

love. I thus discovered, in the twinkling of an eye, how matters stood with Regnier and La Berthonie."

"How am I to rid myself of these two wasps?" inquired the artist in despair.

"Leave that to *me!*" said Livernais, with confidence. "I am a scarecrow to gay gallants, and do not esteem these two much braver than their seven predecessors. Give me my own way, and I undertake to free you from them in three days."

"In what manner?"

"In the first place, give me Regnier's letter."

"But—is it right to—?"

"I must have it," persisted Livernais. "Have you no confidence in your friend? Do you mistrust me?"

"Not in the least," said Colonge. "*Here* is the letter; and now, what will you do with it?"

"I will tell you, hereafter. Now, I have

only one thing to ask you. There are races to-morrow, at the Croix de Berny. Madame de Gabriel intends to go, and I know from good authority, that your wife wishes to accompany her."

"Has she spoken to you on the subject?"

"My dear friend, between the confidence of the husband and the wife, I should have more than enough. To return to the subject, you must use your marital authority to decide Madame Colonge to accompany Madame de Gabriel; which, as she desires it, will not be very difficult. I, as well as Regnier and La Berthonie, shall be of the party; and I promise you, they shall have enough to do to circumvent my guardianship."

"How so?"

"That is my secret."

Colonge paused. "I know," said he, "you are a man of your word. Do as you please."

"The party must be arranged immediately. Come and speak to Madame Colonge."

The two friends returned together to the ball-room, and proceeded towards the lady, beside whom, they found Monsieur La Berthonie, apparently more at his ease than when displaying his portly person in the quadrille. Relieved from impertinent spectators, he had resumed the conversation in French, as there is nothing more difficult than to do the amiable in an unfamiliar language. Possessing a quick and sarcastic mind, and incited by the desire to please, anecdotes, witticisms and piquant remarks flowed inexhaustibly from his lips. A man of such resources must necessarily be acceptable to a woman, in point of society; yet, from the apparent indifference of Madame Colonge, it might be inferred, that she took little pleasure in his conversation.

At a short distance, ensconced in the recess of a window whose red hangings set forth the striking paleness of his face, stood Felicien Regnier, his eyes riveted upon his Haidee. At every smile of her stout partner, the young

poet knit his threatening brows; and the more radiant the face of the one, the more gloomy the brow of the other. It was a duel between an elegy and a madrigal.

"There are your wasps, in fierce opposition to each other," observed Monsieur de Livernais, touching the elbow of his companion. "Since you say you have no talent for observation, take a lesson. Remark the position of each. La Berthonie is clever, and talks with facility upon all and every thing, no matter what, provided he talks. His efforts are directed to the ear rather than the eye. Some women condescend to listen to these ugly men when thus amusing; nay, they even shut their eyes as they listen; and could La Berthonie obtain that favour, he were a match for the Apollo Belvidere. Have a care, Colonge! The serpent of the terrestrial paradise was not handsome, but had a forked tongue. As to the little poet, quickness of speech is not his forte; but his silence assumes the pensive

Byronian attitude; his style of writing is not the less inflammatory. These manœuvres of quills and paper, with their pale faces and exterminating glances, sometimes achieve a triumph. Trust them not, my dear fellow."

"To whom am I to trust?" faltered the painter, in despair.

But at that moment, on seeing the two friends approaching, Madame Colonge turned a deaf ear to the compliments of Monsieur La Berthonie, and addressing her husband with a resentful air, exclaimed:

"At last, then, you are come to look after me! I am really in luck! Whist must be very attractive———"

"What business has a man in a ball-room, who does not dance?" replied the artist, with a smile.

"You might look at the dancing of your wife."

"If I followed my inclinations. But what would your partners say?"

" They would speak English!" whispered the Baron, glancing, with a smile, at Monsieur La Berthonie. The stout gentleman was not the man to decline giving thrust for thrust.

" You seem to dislike English," said he. " I thought you understood it. Surely, Lady Osborne gave you a lesson?"

Monsieur de Livernais had lately received a severe rebuff from one of the most charming Englishwomen of the Faubourg St. Honoré, to whom he had presumed to pay his addresses; but in which the English language had little concern. This allusion, anything but complimentary to his prowess in gallantry, produced a conscious blush on his cheek. He gave an indignant glance at Monsieur La Berthonie, who far from being alarmed, eyed him in return with a sarcastic smile. The admirer of Madame Colonge, and the man who had constituted himself her protector mutually regarded each other like two dogs on the eve of a fight; when, as if by a tacit understanding they faced about. The

artist appeared to remark this significant dumb-shew and glanced towards his wife who replied by an arch smile.

" Monsieur de Livernais, has just informed me," said he, " that you wish to accompany Madame de Gabriel to the steeple-chase, to-morrow ?"

" I should certainly like it, if you have no objection," replied she.

" Am I so great a tyrant, then ?" retorted Colonge, with a smile.

" Will you accompany us ?" said she, smiling in her turn.

" And my picture, dear Aurélie ?"

" If you know how much you make me detest painting, you would never mention it again."

" You may detest painting as much as you please, provided you do not detest the painter."

" I love him dearly, when he is kind and obliging."

" How can he oblige you, then ?"

"By coming with us, to-morrow. You could surely spare us one morning."

"When my picture is finished, I shall be at your service," replied the artist, who in the ardour of his vocation, regarded the loss of a day as a positive calamity.

"Let us talk no more of it," said Madame Colonge; "it is three o'clock, and I am tired. Pray inquire for the carriage."

Of all the orders a husband receives from his wife, that which releases him from duty at a ball, is the one most scrupulously executed. Colonge, who like most of his fellow artists, could ill spare a night's rest, hastened to leave the room, and as quickly returned. As they were about to proceed to the carriage, they were met by La Berthonie, Felicien Regnier, and the Baron de Livernais, waiting their passage like so many sentries.

The lady smiled graciously at the first,—slightly noticed the elegiac countenance of the second, and looked indignant at the third, when

somewhat more familiarly than the others, he took leave of her. The painter saw little of all this, or at least affected blindness. In the carriage, the painter and his wife remained mutually silent and reserved.

"What a charming evening we have had!" said Aurélie, at last, tearing her bouquet to pieces.

"Charming!" replied the husband.

"Some people find balls a bore; for my part, I could dance my whole life long without being tired."

"You were much amused then?"

"Much!—I did not miss a single dance."

"Did you dance with La Berthonie?" inquired Colonge, with seeming indifference.

"Three times," replied Aurélie articulating the words abruptly.

"And a charming partner you must have found him!—Berthonie is as clever as he is fat," said the painter, satirical in spite of himself.

" He is not so very fat," retorted Madame Colonge with a somewhat forced vivacity. " His appearance is agreeable; I consider him an acquisition to my acquaintance."

The painter was silent, though all he had learned from Monsieur de Livernais, did not tend to please him. But it was with difficulty he resisted the inclination to sleep arising from the monotonous rolling of the carriage. On finding her husband abstain from all contradiction, Madame Colonge, more and more irritated, attempted another species of attack.

" Madame de Gabriel, ought to be satisfied with her party," said she; " every thing succeeded to-night. There were so many beautiful women, and distinguished men. *Apropos*, have you heard any one speak of the poem, about to be published by Monsieur Regnier, called " Mists and Dews." They say it is a remarkable work, and such as Lamartine might be proud of."

Aurélie waited in vain the answer of her husband; but finding him mute, she looked at him, so as to force him to speak. Overcome by the fatigues of the evening, the artist sat resting his head in the angle of the carriage, and in spite of cares, jealousies and love, was in fact fast asleep!—

Madame Colonge contemplated him with feelings of indignation.

"If I had talked of painting," thought she, "he would not have fallen asleep. Beyond his easel, nothing interests him. If any one try to please me, or pay me attention, he is not even aware of it:—no fear of losing my affection ever occurs to him. His art appears the only thing worthy to interest him. Art—fame—glory—how I hate the words!—Actually to fall asleep while I was talking!—How is it possible to retain one's love for such a man?"—

Aurélie wrapt in her cloak, now ensconced herself in the opposite angle of the carriage.

But instead of dozing like her husband, she fell into a train of meditation. Such reveries are not, perhaps, altogether advantageous to matrimonial happiness!

## CHAPTER III.

Previous to his marriage, Colonge, more from carelessness than diffidence, had neglected his talents. Like many other artists of merit who shrink from considerable undertakings, he devoted himself to less important works not because they were easier than historical pictures, but because they were more quickly executed. Every time he took up the pencil, he racked his imagination to find subjects for a small canvass; rejecting those great conceptions, the execution of which would have carried him beyond the limit his indolence had assigned. To obtain a moderate reputation by moderate exertions, was the end and aim he frankly avowed. As to

permanent fame, the glorious aim of every real artist, he regarded it with the eye of the sparrow, who perched upon a twig, views with indifference the stormy region into which the eagle soars above his head.

"Glory!" he sometimes ejaculated with a sneer. "If she beckoned me to her arms, I would not be at the trouble to advance. A great name is too great a burthen."

It was in vain his friends used to assure him that genius ought not to be inert.—"You have no right to be indolent," said they. "By working the surface of the mine, instead of plunging into it, in place of a vein of gold you will find only rubbish. You waste in trifling designs, talents which, if well employed, would serve to render your name immortal. Remember that one unique and strenuous effort leads to immortal fame. Géricault owes his renown to a single painting."

"I am not a Géricault!" replied the artist modestly.

"You may become one. Have you no desire to bequeath your name to posterity?"

"What matters whether my works survive me, provided they enable me to live in comfort?" persisted Colonge.

This prosaic answer closed the mouths of the officious counsellors.

In tropical countries, there are lands so fertile, that labour seems superfluous. It requires only to rake the earth, and strew the seed, to produce an abundant harvest. The talent of our young painter resembled these favoured lands. However superficially sowed, they produced fruits denied to more arduous efforts of industry. It was impossible to be more successful at less mental cost. In a short space of time, and without effort, Colonge had achieved a considerable reputation; always, however, in proportion to the style he had adopted. But the insignificance of the result, was no mortification to him;—if the little produced had cost but little trouble, it was all he required.

To the greater number of artists, the epoch of marriage gives the signal for relaxation and apathy. For Colonge, on the contrary, it became the source of new ambitions ;—the Capua in which the young artist had hitherto been imprisoned, being reduced to ashes in the following manner.

One evening, at a party to which he had escorted his wife, Colonge heard the following conversation betwixt two men behind whom he happened to stand.

" Who is that charming woman, dressed in black ?"—inquired one of them.

" It is a Madame Colonge," replied the other. " Is she not beautiful ?"

" Admirable !—is she a married woman, or a widow ?"

" Faith, I know not. I think though there must be some individual of that name in the room, either a musician, a lawyer, or professional of some sort; but who ever heard of him ? Defunct or living, there

is no husband possible for such a divinity as that."

Colonge felt inclined to prove his existence by chastising the author of the impertinence. He, however, refrained; but the indirect affront he had just received, dropped into his heart the seed of one of those energetic resolutions, which influence the destiny of a man, and unfold a new horizon to his eyes.

"The facetious gentleman was right," thought he, with a bitter irony. "Formerly, my existence was a blank, and I am now becoming a complete nonentity! Aurélie is so beautiful! By her side, even a superior man would be scarcely noticed; and I, a nobody, must necessarily vanish. Such costly diamonds should be set in gold—I am merely copper. Before my marriage, my modest name possessed a value, more or less deserved; but it was all my own. Now, I have forfeited that individuality—unpretending as it was. I am no longer Colonge—but the husband of Madame

Colonge; and I have thus achieved insignificance, by the means through which a girl achieves the honours of matronhood. Have I in fact, so much as the standing of a Canoness of Munich?—I doubt it!—Many husbands serve as a mere label to their wives; but such a portion will not suit me!" resumed Colonge, with a feeling of indignant pride. "I am not made for such utter insignificance as to be the parasite ivy, when I feel as robust as the rugged oak. No, no! Beauty may be a queen, but genius shall be emperor; and genius, or at least the germ of genius, I possess. When single, I trifled with my task; but what was then indolence, would now be cowardice. It is no longer a question of reputation; my welfare is at stake. No sooner shall my wife remark the contempt with which I am treated, than she will despise me. To work then! Let us fight for honour, if not for victory. So so! yonder insolent personage, knows not whether I am a musician, or a lawyer?—Before a year

shall have elapsed, he shall recognise me as an artist."

For the first time, Colonge heard distinctly that divine and mysterious voice, which from the depths of a human soul, reveals the secrets of fate. Pride took the place of enthusiasm. So long as he had flattered himself into faith in his own strength, he had mistrusted it; but once contested, his credulity returned.

Fervent and indefatigable, Colonge did not waste in useless reveries the purpose he had assumed. With a disdainful hand, he rejected the slender brush, the contracted canvass and diminutive easel, which till now had served his views of art. He substituted deep reflections for slight sketches; in lieu of feeble imitations of Watteau and Greuze, he studied with profound attention the old masters. All this was soon whispered in the Parisian world of art; a report producing malicious sneers upon the lips of more than one of his acquaintance.

"Have you heard the news?" said one. "Colonge is engaged upon an historical painting for the next exhibition at the Louvre."

"Impossible!" replied another, "you mean upon some Swiss peasant on the border of a lake, or a shepherdess gathering daisies."

"An historical painting, I tell you;—the Battle of the Cimbri."

This pompous announcement, was received with a shout of laughter. The idea of a combination between the brush of Colonge, and the sword of Marius seemed irresistibly droll.

"You need not laugh," said the man who communicated the news. "The thing is certain, though no one has seen the picture. It is a profound mystery. Colonge allows no one to enter his studio—not even his wife. The effect will be astounding. Colonge neither eats, drinks, nor sleeps. The only place where one occasionally meets him, is the Gallery of the Louvre, where he goes to study the Spanish masters."

They now laughed again, and sneers the most disparaging were lavished upon the audacious painter; the least humane decided him to be cracked. Musard composing an opera in five acts, or Paul de Kock writing a funeral oration, could not have caused greater amazement, than the invasion by Colonge of the field of history.

He was soon aware of the impertinent curiosity evinced upon the subject of his painting, which nobody had as yet seen; and the mock felicitations with which his brother artists alluded to the subject, forewarned him of the inexorable ridicule which awaited him in case of failure. This possibility, so well calculated to damp his ardour, served only to redouble his energies. Confronted with danger, cowards turn pale; but the truly brave become more daring. In his earnest pride, Colonge looked upon this moment of his life, as his Rubicon.

"The die is cast!" said he, "I must conquer or die."

Colonge pursued his undertaking accordingly, with ceaseless energy, locking himself in his studio, from morning till night. There, unobserved by friend or foe, unaided by encouragement, but free from the insinuations of envy—alone with inspiration, that heavenly spirit—enamoured of his work, as a Pythoness of her divinity, he guided his pencil upon the gigantic canvass which was to convey glory, or death. His hand doomed by criticism to insignificance, defined the iron phalanx, with its shivered lances, rent armour, and broken swords ;—the Romans and the Cimbri in the furious encounter, crushing under their chariot wheels, the fair daughters of the north, so that the wolf of the Capitol might receive a worthy tribute.

In genuine talent, there exists an innate ardour which vulgar pursuits may sometimes subdue, but which bursts forth in the day of trial, even as the smell of blood revives the terrible instinct of the lion. By degrees, as the stirring

details of his work developed themselves, Colonge experienced that glow of fanaticism, without which the best efforts are cold and colourless. Hitherto, he had relied solely on his knowledge of art. Enthusiastic for success, he now gave vent to the impulses of his soul.

"This is painting in earnest!" said he. But such moments of triumph are rare; and when the artist found his palette unequal to the soarings of his imagination, he relapsed into doubt and anxiety. A mist seemed to overhang his painting;—the colours seemed dull and flat—the outline compressed and false, —the atmosphere wanting in transparency—the ground in solidity. A want of general clearness displeased him, and the best conceived groups, appeared no better than indistinct masses. The figures of which he had before admired the expression and relief, seemed exaggerated. A doubtful fore-shortening—an arm ill put on—defective drapery—a false ef-

fect of shade, plunged him into despair. Just as in moments of enthusiasm, he exulted in the merits of his work, at other times, he underrated and disparaged it, and proclaimed himself a lost man. But whenever there shone forth anew a ray of that divine sun which illumines the imagination of artists, the courage and confidence of Colonge were restored.

By turns fervent and depressed, the artist pursued his work, despising alike the sneers of envy, and the perfidious homage of his colleagues. Nothing could allure him from this sedentary and laborious life; when, at the setting in of winter, he was beset by one of those conjugal perplexities which husbands rarely foresee, but always resent.

The wife of Colonge was young, rich and handsome. That the three wreaths—of youth, wealth and beauty, should create a crown of thorns, appears inexplicable; but so it was. On her appearance in the world, Aurélie became the object of that importunate adora-

tion, to which women adopted by the caprice of fashion, must inevitably submit;—the object of a profane crusade, which every day enlisted a fresh recruit in its unholy army. The race of lady killers is essentially imitative, and the story of Panurge's sheep forms their true illustration. Many who, left to their own instigations, would have scarcely remarked the painter's wife, became her enthusiastic admirers, the moment it was the fashion to find her charming; and the number of pretenders increased with alarming rapidity.

The new Armida, at first deceived as to the nature of their admiration, perceived only the attention due to her beauty, and supported her triumphs with such ingenuous self-possession, that already her rivals taxed her with consummate coquetry. Colonge, though absorbed by his work, took alarm at the first success of his wife, just as a horse recoils on approaching the brink of the precipice. Jealousy, that

fatal foe of wedded life, transfixed him with one of her envenomed bolts.

For several days, the artist, depressed by anxieties heretofore unknown, neglected his easel to devote himself to one of those marital studies, the exclusive interest of which obliterates all other cares. Assuming a necessary degree of caution, he watched Aurélie closely, and found her as we have described her, ingenuous in her desire to please, enjoying her success but not exulting in it. Her virtuous heart and playful mind, promoted to the throne of fashion, resolved to exercise—"*sans peur et sans reproche*," the sceptre conferred by her beauty. The result of this scrutiny tranquillized Colonge for a time. But he had still misgivings for the future. So many women adhere to only one half the device of the chevalier Bayard !—

In subjecting Aurélie to this close and severe scrutiny, the artist could not fail to discover certain ambuscades in which were

posted the enemies of his domestic happiness. Each of these destroyers of conjugal peace, proceeded upon a system consonant with his character. One confined himself to the humble demonstrations of devoted and timid affection. Another rushed into extremes of the most chivalrous and exaggerated gallantry; while a third, an engineer in love, masked himself in the entrenchment of respect, calculating the moment in which he dare divulge his project. Another, an incarnate elegy, waited with his sullen face, in the hollow way of fantastical exaltation. The various phases of social life were represented in this unprincipled crew. Independent of indigenous competitors, there was a Russian diplomatist, and a Spanish refugee. Exotic and native enemies were arrayed against his peace!—

After sternly reflecting on the different stratagems of the admirers of his wife, Colonge fell into a state of despair. The number of chances against his retaining the undivided affections

of Aurélie, was alarming. Surrounded on all sides, exposed to unforseen, varied, and endless attacks, how could he hope that no impression would be made on her feelings!

Occupied as he was in his vocations, how was he to defend her young heart against these bold assailants? Several projects presented themselves successively to his mind. The most efficacious seemed to be to withdraw her from the perilous amusements of the world; inspire her with a taste for domestic life, and retire with her into a seclusion inaccessible to temptation; in a word, to realize, amid the turmoil of Parisian life, that dream of double solitude, so dear to loving hearts. Such an idea, was indeed delightful, both to the artist, the lover, and the husband!

But how imbue a woman reared in the presumptuous frivolities of modern education, with the grave and dutiful feelings, prompting the Roman matrons to the worship of their lares and penates? How persuade a young

bride to forego the joys and pleasures she conceives to be the legitimate privilege of her new position? How violate the promises he had made her in their days of courtship?

"She might fairly accuse me of tyranny," thought Colonge, reflecting upon the consequences of such a project. "At thirty, I shall have to pass for an Arnolphe, or a Bartolo; and after once giving way to that system, to be consistent, I must resort to duennas, bolts, and barred windows. For Aurélie would submit with reluctance and regret. In her heart, she would rebel, and why provoke rebellion? The pleasures of society present to *her* the charms and attractions suitable to her age; and she plays with her diamonds, dress, and equipage, as she did with her playthings, when a child. This thirst for pleasure, will cure itself by the time she is better acquainted with the world, and the value of its praise; but abruptly checked, would generate mischief. That which is a childish whim, would become

later an absorbing passion. To succeed, I must be prudent. The plan must proceed from herself, not from me. I would have *her* say, 'Enough of the world; let us live for each other.' God grant my wish may be accomplished!"

Conscious of the necessity for patience and forbearance, Colonge sought means of defence suitable to the dangerous grounds upon which he was compelled to stand; his best defence seeming to lie in unceasing and indefatigable vigilance. In Paris, jealous husbands are rare. It is not, however, unexampled for a man to become a fixture in the chamber of his wife, like a creditor in pursuit of a refractory debtor;—to dress when she dresses—read the letters she receives—follow her in her walks—to church, balls, or visits; in a word become her gaoler at home, on the plea of affection; and in the houses of her friends, post himself so as to watch every movement, and listen to every word, knit the brow when she waltzes, or

bite the lips if a distinguished man approach her;—preserving an invariable scowl, whether she be gay or sad, and forcing her away from an agreeable party, with the ferocity of a wolf, carrying off its prey.

But the more the artist dwelt upon the details of such an existence, the more did he recoil from the attempt.

"Such conduct is not love," said he, "but despotism!—I will not become a spy. The woman who requires watching, is not worth the pains of the watcher."

The system of seclusion as well as that of inquisition being rejected, the one as base the other as dangerous, one resource alone remained:—that of adopting the philosophical tranquillity, the solace of so many of his colleagues; a kind of matrimonial fatalism, which resigns itself to all emergencies, like the Turk, who sees his dwelling in flames, and sits with his arms and legs crossed, smoking his pipe.

But though the artist possessed too much

sense to shut up his wife, and too much pride to watch her, he had also too sincere a passion for her to quit the helm of this richly freighted vessel of happiness and rely upon his star, while listening to the first howlings of the storm. He knew full well that fortune favours the brave; but that as applied to marriage, fatalism, is a perilous doctrine; and consequently rejected this third hypothesis as disdainfully as the other two.

After wounding his fingers in trying to grasp a branch of this briary subject, Colonge remained painfully perplexed; eager to decide, but infirm of purpose; convinced of the danger of inaction, yet, in the fear of impairnig his position, compelled to conceal a jealousy as acute as it was passive.

"After all, what is there to fear?" thought he. "Aurélie loves me, and her attachment is a coat of mail, against which the most artful shafts will be aimed in vain."

From this reflection, he gathered courage;

but on witnessing anew the devoted attentions paid to his lovely wife, became again discouraged.

"What a wretch am I become!" cried he, "where is now my gaiety, and where my lightsome heart?—A year ago I was happy! Why, why, did I marry; or at all events unite myself with so captivating, so seductive a partner? Ought I not to have known that others would be fascinated like myself; and that once possessed of this treasure, I must guard it night and day?—Yet in that very task of guardianship, I must waste more energy and strength, than would suffice for a brilliant reputation! Who, *who* would be the husband of a beauty?"

## CHAPTER IV.

We have already said that the revolution of July, deprived the Baron de Livernais of office; and that it was to fill the void in his existence, he had seriously devoted himself to the career of a man of gallantry; heedless of the anachronism he was committing in returning, in these phlegmatic times, to the frivolous conceits of a former age.

In his new career, he could boast, indeed, of occasional triumphs; but the rebuff received at the hands of the indignant Lady Osborne, had somewhat obscured their glory. The fair daughter of Albion had so completely bid defiance to the daring prowess of the beau of forty-six, that not to forfeit his redoutable

reputation as a lady-killer, he felt that he must silence, by some miraculous achievement, the sarcasms of society.

The first object of a general, compelled to raise a siege, is to repair, by a new success, the injury to his fame. The Baron, therefore, after his defeat, sought out a woman of such unquestionable merit that the fact of pleasing her must afford an incontestable triumph. Having vacillated some time between divers luminaries of beauty, wit, and virtue, his hesitation ceased on beholding Madame Colonge. Struck by the sensation produced by the artist's wife on her first appearance in the world, Monsieur de Livernais imagined that she would be a fitting capital to crown the column of his victories; and forthwith hastened to the accomplishment of this monumental conquest.

Experience constitutes the secret of success of many a middle aged beau. The superior dexterity with which they address themselves to the foibles of the sex, is an

advantage before which the impetuosity of youth hides its diminished head.

The Baron possessed this incomparable science; and like the spider, was accustomed to increase his web, mesh by mesh. On the present occasion, he felt bound to surpass himself and exerted to the utmost his powers of imagination. Permitting the swarm of vulgar admirers who, as soon as they hail the flower of a new and unknown beauty, fly forwards to compete for its perfumes, to buzz around Aurélie, he remained patiently contemplating the conquest, which was to add new lustre to his heroism.

There had existed only a common acquaintanceship betwixt Colonge and Livernais. The artist and the man of the world shook hands when they met in the street, and exchanged a word in the same room; but their intimacy went no further. By a series of progressive management, at which the most cautious could take no exception, his unfrequent visits

became gradually metamorphosed into daily intercourse. Pretending an enthusiastic admiration for the arts, he established himself in the studio of Colonge, who reserved only the secret of his picture of the Cimbri from the Baron; and acquired by degrees the privileges dear to the friends and colleagues of an artist. He who till now had professed the fastidiousness of a man of the boudoir, and abstained from smoking, had his pipe suspended in the studio; a familiarity equivalent, among artists, to a knife and fork at the table of the rich.

Having ingratiated himself with the husband, and as he thought sufficiently blinded his observation, Monsieur de Livernais proceeded to his principal point of attack; and began his lines of circumvallation around the woman on whose heart he trusted to make an impression.

In this new project, he was doomed to meet formidable competitors, such as would have cooled the courage of one less confident in the

irresistibility of his personal merits. Far from being disheartened by the unusual number of rivals through whom he was to force his way, if not remain in the rear, the Baron came, as regarded them, to a most heroic determination.

"Had I only the husband to supplant," thought he, "I need give myself little trouble. But should the pre-occupation of Colonge end with disgusting his wife, there are at least ten pretenders waiting for the prize. If I succeed in estranging her heart from domestic life, it will not suit me to form a catspaw for the chestnuts, in favour of another. I shall, therefore, begin by dismissing my rivals. Such is the logical order in which my victims must be immolated."

Just as the Baron had resolved upon the extermination of his competitors, an unforeseen incident tended to serve his profoundly conceived projects.

We have already dwelt upon the misgivings

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laborious efforts of her husband to an inordinate thirst for fame, she grew sick at heart under the influence of supposed neglect.

"He prefers his paintings to his wife!" faltered she, on the artist sending to her one day to beg she would not wait dinner.

From that moment, she became the prey of misgivings less justifiable than those which had caused such anxiety to her husband. But they were quite as poignant; for the tortures of the imagination are often more painful to endure than the bitterness of real woe. Jealous of the anticipated glory of Colonge, she experienced against that strange and intangible rival, all the hatred that might have been inspired by a living woman. The painting of the Cimbri, which, in spite of her entreaties, she had not seen, became a nightmare, of which the very idea was a source of jealousy and despair.

The artist had now to counteract the ingenious stratagems resorted to by his wife, to

allure him from his seclusion in his studio. But he courageously resisted her attempts; till Aurélie, at last hopeless, refrained from further efforts; and affecting indifference, rushed into the vortex of fashionable life, in the hope of thwarting her husband.

We have already shown how completely she succeeded. His wits ever on the alert, Monsieur de Livernais detected the jealousy of the artist, and the anxiety of his wife. Both feelings appeared favourable to his project, and he thenceforth based his plans upon this double point. Without loss of time, he established himself, armed at all points, near both husband and wife; and by Machiavelism almost diabolical, insinuated himself into their mutual confidence.

"What depresses you?" said he affectionately to Colonge, on finding him one morning more dejected than usual.

"I am thinking of my accursed painting!" replied the artist, trying to smile. "Day after day, I become less pleased with it."

"You would deceive me," replied the Baron, knowingly; "and might succeed, were I less your friend. No! it is not the painting that worries you. Shall I tell you of what you are thinking?"

"Pray do!" said Colonge, coldly.

"You are thinking of Monsieur Mariendorf, who, at the Opera last night, remained during two acts in the box of Madame Colonge. I fear you find these Russian diplomatists rather importunate?"

Colonge looked eagerly at the Baron.

"You fancy me jealous then?" said he.

"I do!" replied Monsieur de Livernais. You see I am more frank than yourself. I have been jealous too; and had I a wife as handsome as yours, I should vainly try to suppress the feeling. I deeply sympathize in your position, and though you evince but little confidence in me, am inclined to render you a service."

"What service?"

"Rid you of the amiable Muscovite!"

The painter paused for a moment.

"I will not deny," said he, at last, "that I should be glad to see no more of him."

Monsieur de Livernais required no further authority, but instantly commenced his Russian campaign; and more fortunate than Napoleon, came out of it victorious. Ten days had hardly elapsed, before Mariendorf discontinued his visits to Madame Colonge.

"The Kalmuc is furious!" said the Baron to the artist. "But there is also a fiery Castilian, Don Antonio de Puentes y Cabra, whom I should not be sorry to mow down."

"Cut away!" replied Colonge.

"I have noticed with disgust his assiduities to the wife of my friend."

The Spaniard made three days longer resistance than the Russian, but finally withdrew from the skilful attack of the Baron; who, upon the painter inquiring by what conjuration he had obtained such prompt results, merely replied—"That, my dear fellow, is in-

deed, a profound mystery. But provided you reap the fruits of my cabalistic science, no matter by what means I succeed."

The Baron was now regularly installed in the duties of his singular office, as head of the matrimonial police, in accordance with the views and wishes of the painter; and soon found that his vocation was anything but a sinecure. From the discomfiture of Don Antonio de Puentes y Cabra, till the day he undertook to defeat the projects of Monsieur La Berthonie and the poet Felicien Regnier, the guardian of Madame Colonge had, according to his own expression, "mowed down" five of his official rivals.

But while affecting to act purely in the interests of his friend, he was engaged in furthering his own particular ends. As double faced as most adventurers in gallantry, while on the one hand he presented a countenance teeming with friendship and sincerity, that which he exhibited to Aurélie was no less the

result of calculation and artifice. Assiduous, insinuating, discreet, invariably obsequious and compliant, skilful in provoking unlimited confidence, the Baron omitted nothing by which to cultivate the intimacy of the young wife.

To a certain degree, he had succeeded in obtaining her confidence. Madame Colonge admitted to him the jealousy from the anguish of which she had so long suffered; and though the Baron needed not such an admission, he listened to it with inimitable professions of interest. Rather than seize the opportunity to disparage Colonge, as some less experienced man might have done, he warmly defended him; for once urged by the spirit of contradiction, a woman will accuse even the husband she loves.

"Believe me, Madam, you wrong him," said the Baron, with friendly zeal; "what you attribute to Colonge is the mere consequence of his position. Such is the case with all men of genius:—their works before every

thing! In them, ideas take up so wide a space as to exclude the feelings which manifest themselves when the strain of genius is mute, like weeds that force their way betwixt the flags of an abandoned yard. This despotic control of the brain over the heart, is grievous, I confess; but how can it be otherwise? Would you stifle the ambition of an artist? Would you paralyze the cause to which he imagines himself destined? Can you require that he should shiver the pencil at your feet which is to procure him an immortal name? One might as well demand from an eagle the pathos of the dove! Such a pretension is unjust. Besides, Colonge would not submit to it. You must, therefore, resign yourself to be second in the affections of your husband! To you I can imagine that the idea of my favoured rival must appear strange and vexatious. But remember, your rival is glory, to which Beauty itself may yield precedence without humiliation."

These words, pronounced in a mellifluous

voice so far from assuaging the anguish of Aurélie, served to augment the tortures of her heart.

"And this is all his best friends can offer in justification of his neglect!" thought the young wife, with renewed vexation. "Because he is a man of talent, he is privileged to forget me! Better have allied myself with a commoner order of mind; for then, perhaps, I should have been loved and cherished."

Such was the position of the three principal personages of this story, on the day following the ball of Madame de Gabriel, to which an unforeseen incident, on that very day, served to furnish a more rapid and interesting development.

## CHAPTER V.

It was two in the afternoon, and though returned late from the ball, Colonge had been at work since an early hour, locked up in his studio. Aurélie, less active than her husband, had just quitted her bed-chamber; and was sitting alone in her drawing-room, turning over the leaves of a new novel and continuing that sleepless dream to which we have before referred.

A new feeling, still more poignant and bitter, had combined with the rest. Less proficient than the Baron de Livernais, Monsieur La Berthonie had been guilty at the ball of attributing injuries to the husband, such as he pretended might justify retaliation on the

part of the wife. Urged by specious questions which the ingenuousness of her interrogator seemed to deprive of indecorum, Madame Colonge had been led by degrees to revert to the theme of her usual meditations. After repelling at first the malicious insinuations directed against her husband, she rather confirmed them at last, by expatiating herself, upon the excessive zeal with which, for two months past, he had devoted himself to his work. Berthonie listened to the words of the injured woman with a feigned look of incredulity.

"Fifteen hours a day?" exclaimed he. "Colonge paint fifteen hours a day? Never will I believe it! The most indefatigable artist could not resist such fatigue; and among the qualities of your husband, his love of his art is not, I suspect, the most potent."

"It is nevertheless certain that he passes whole days in his studio," replied Aurélie.

"*You* may believe he does, Madam, but with me, only seeing is believing."

"Do you doubt my word—or his?"—

"If I do not bow to your single assertion, it is because I believe in public report. You assert that of which you are not certain. It is said that, for some time past, you have submitted, in the most exemplary manner, to an unprecedented instance of marital despotism, and that you have not dared to penetrate his studio. If this be true, I shall esteem it truly edifying that the miraculous work of Colonge is an article of faith for you. But pray be tolerant with my involuntary incredulity. Allow me to admire your confidence in respectful silence."

Aurélie, too proud to continue a similar discussion, instead of answering Monsieur La Berthonie, looked grave, and changed the conversation. But his perfidious manœuvre, soon produced its fruits; for nothing can equal the

rapidity with which suspicions are conceived in a character predisposed to jealousy.

Till now, Madame Colonge, in spite of her vexation, had retained the most absolute confidence in her husband. She accused him, it is true, of egotism, on finding herself neglected for his art and desire of fame; but it was impossible for her to think herself betrayed. This idea, however, now presented itself for the first time to her mind; and her heart smarted as if pierced by a dagger.

"Monsieur La Berthonie is perhaps right!" thought she suddenly. "How can I tell that Colonge passes all this time in his studio? Would he lock himself up, if he had nothing to conceal? And when I suppose him locked up, can I be sure that he is even in the house?"

Jealousy resembles the steed of Mazeppa. No sooner is the victim lashed to its foaming sides, than it bears him off to the most arid steppes of the imagination, and leaves him to the beak of the vulture. Aurélie rushed rapidly

through a wilderness of tortures. From suspicion to conviction, she made but a single step. Her husband had deceived her. Doubt was no longer possible. His continual preoccupation, his mysterious seclusion, his incredible efforts, in a word, all the details of his strange conduct, already the source of such acute anguish, were explained!

"At this very instant, perhaps, he is not in his studio," thought Aurélie. "I will ascertain!" cried she, abruptly rising. "I can no longer live in this incertitude!"

She was about to leave the room, but quickly changed her mind. After the instigations of jealousy, came those of pride. Disdaining to resort to espionage, Madame Colonge remained some time absorbed in pensive meditation. On hearing the door open, she started up.

"The Baron de Livernais!" announced the servant in waiting; who vanished, as soon as he had made way for the Adonis of forty-six.

The Baron advanced towards Aurélie with his habitual courtesy; but perceiving the clouded brow of the lovely woman, became grave, and assumed a look of sympathy.

"You are ill, Madam. I am sure that something has vexed you," said he. "Your beauty seldom suffers from the effects of a ball; so that the change in your countenance must proceed from some latent cause."

The jealousies to which women are subject, usually recoils upon their nearest friend. Too proud to clear up her doubts herself, Aurélie determined to accept the aid of another; and selected Monsieur de Livernais, whose acquiescence she had already put to the test.

"I see you wish to make me believe that, in the course of the night, I am become frightful," said she, trying to smile. "To punish you for so strange a supposition, I feel inclined to tax your good offices."

"Speak, Madam! I am completely at your orders."

"You are not mistaken. Something weighs upon my mind, but not so serious as you suppose;—a caprice, a mere nothing! You are aware of my rigorous exclusion from my husband's studio. For some time, I have obediently submitted; but I now feel a strong inclination to taste the forbidden fruit. If I but mention it to Colonge, he laughs at me, and tells me that, in less than a month, my curiosity will be gratified. But should he concede this favour to another, to you, for instance, it would be impossible, afterwards, to refuse me."

"You wish me, then, to force the door of your husband's sanctuary? I will take the fortress by assault; but if I perish on the breach, it is by your will and pleasure! Is Colonge now in his studio?"

"Where should he be?" said Aurélie, involuntarily frowning.

"In that case, I will, if you approve, commence operations. Succeed or fail, I will

come and give you a report of my attempt."

"I shall expect you," replied the jealous wife, who, after the departure of the Baron, impatiently counted the minutes of his absence. On quitting her apartment, the Baron rapidly cleared the stories separating the studio from the dwelling-rooms. Having entered the outer room, which during the day was never locked, he knocked several times at the door of the artist's studio, who, impatient of interruption, rushed to half open the door, and stood his ground, as if determined to defend himself.

"My dear Sir," said the Baron, perceiving his threatening position, "enter I must, for I am about to render you a service, and therefore deserve that there should be an exception in my favour. Sooner or later, this mysterious painting must be seen; then why refuse me the pleasure of being the first to admire it?"

"It is not yet worthy of your criticism,"

replied Colonge, with the modesty under which people of talent contrive to conceal their pride. "If you have any thing important to communicate, let us go down to another room."

"No," replied Monsieur de Livernais: "if you are obstinate, remember I am a Breton. I had the conceit yesterday to boast that I had seen your chef-d'œuvre; and see it I must, or submit to the humiliation of being laughed at."

"In a fortnight it will be finished, and then—"

"In a fortnight any one may see it, and I wish for the precedence. You see, my dear Colonge, it is so fixed a purpose in me, that the devil would not stop me! I am resolved, if you do not let me enter the sanctum sanctorum, to leave you to the tender mercies of your conjugal persecutors, and you may rid yourself of La Berthonie and Regnier as best you can."

"Come in then," said the painter, subdued by this argument. "I can no longer refuse."

The Baron stepped up to the painting, brightened by a winter sun, and pausing, stood in the attitude of admiration.

"There are still many parts to retouch," said Colonge, anxiously following the eye of his judge.

On hearing the voice of the artist, the Baron awoke from the stupor of amazement into which he had been plunged; and throwing down his hat, abruptly seized the artist's hands, which he all but crushed in his grasp.

"My dear friend," said he, with a voice tremulous with emotion, "hitherto you have only been a distinguished artist; but you are become a great painter. Beautiful! magnificent! admirable! I am astounded! I certainly expected to see a good picture, but not such a first rate production as this."

"You think well of it, then?" said the

painter, flattered by such fervent testimonials of enthusiasm.

"It will be the pride of the exhibition," replied Monsieur de Livernais, with increasing ecstasy. "In this picture, you unite the genius of Delacroix, the poetical inspirations of Scheffer, the finish of Delaroche, and the colouring of Decamp. What life! what spirit! what truth! How those soldiers engage, overthrow and repulse! It is something like a battle! not one of your scenes such as one sees at Franconi's circus. This painting smells of blood!—The wounded cry—the horses neigh! —I hear them! Look at the attitude of Marius!—And the women strangling one another to escape from Roman slavery. How beautiful are they in death! Here, a tragedy—yonder, an elegy! Words fail to express my feelings. One can only end with admirable! sublime!"

The biblical figure of a camel passing through the eye of a needle was never better exem-

plified than in the influence of flattery: which, however coarse and undisguised, insinuates itself into the most susceptible minds. While protesting against the inordinate eulogiums lavished upon his work, Colonge did not appear to suspect, for a moment, the sincerity of his ecstatic admirer; but followed him, step by step, while the Baron was performing the pantomimic evolutions common to connoisseurs. By turns approaching or receding, he proceeded from right to left, or left to right; examining minutely every detail, not forgetting the most fleecy cloud, or tiniest tuft of grass.

"As I live, there is a hero with whom I claim acquaintance!" said he, pointing out a personage in the critical position of being pressed to death by a Roman soldier. Colonge turned red at the remark. "If I am not mistaken, it is our friend Berthonie!" persisted the Baron, having examined the fallen Cimbrian.

"Pardon the mute revenge of an artist,"

replied Colonge. "The lady-killers who flutter round my wife, pursue me even to my studio. Their idiot faces intrude even on my canvas; and I often find them at the point of my brush, against my very will."

"There is something of Dante and Michael Angelo in your retribution," exclaimed the Baron, with admiration.

"Unfortunately," resumed the artist, "I have neither hell nor purgatory to inflict upon my foes; and unable to make fiends of them, I make victims. The fellow running away yonder, is Roquancourt; the other falling from his horse, is Mariendorf; the third on his knees imploring mercy, is Don Antonio de Puentes y Cabra; and there lies, half dead, the melancholy youth, Felicien Regnier!"

"What a striking likeness!—Dantan has done nothing better."

"The vengeance in which I have indulged at the expense of these gentlemen, has made me hazard an idea of which the success is

doubtful—the introduction of the grotesque into a serious subject."

"An admirable conception! you apply to painting, the system of Victor Hugo in composition. I suspect the innovation will obtain a success absolutely transcendant; the only reproach I can make you, is that you have omitted your friends, whom you should have pourtrayed as victorious Romans. The idea would have been perfect. I should have been enchanted to be handed down to posterity, as a simple soldier in the triumphant ranks of Marius."

"Your profile is indeed Roman," replied Colonge looking steadfastly at his treacherous friend. "Yonder is the head of a centurion, which does not please me. If you like, I will substitute yours."

"You are too good!" said the Baron, who with difficulty controlled his inclination to laugh at the good-natured simplicity of the

artist. But a minute afterwards, the Baron's eyes became riveted upon a group of women in the foreground of the picture.

"Better and better!" cried he. "Here is another face of my acquaintance. That delectable creature, who is strangling herself with such graceful despair, is Madame — Madame—a German! help me, Colonge!"

"Madame de Grafhen," said Colonge.

"Exactly! Is it as friend or foe, she figures in the scene?"

"As neither the one or the other; but because she happens to be exquisitely fair; as rare a treasure in Paris, as her Teutonic face. You must perceive that the figure in question is in the fullest light, which has compelled me to be particular. You can scarcely imagine the difficulty of that head, I had painted it out at least three times; when I found myself one night at the Opera, next to the box of Madame de Grafhen, who as you know, has a

purely Germanic countenance! *There* is the head I want, thought I. Painted as if it was from memory, what think you of the likeness?"

"Most striking!" replied the Baron, looking at the portrait of the Teutonic beauty; "your picture is in all respects perfection!" Then, after expressing himself highly grateful for the favour he had received; "I will not intrude further upon your valuable time," said he. "Adieu; as I go down, I will present my respects to Madame Colonge."

"Is not to-morrow the steeple-chase at Berny?" inquired the artist.

"Yes! and on my return, I will give you all the particulars."

"You remember your promise respecting little Regnier and my trusty friend La Berthonie?"

"Of course I do! They shall share the fate of their seven predecessors."

Monsieur de Livernais now grasped the artist's hand, with hypocritical cordiality; but

had no sooner quitted the studio, than his face betrayed the contempt he had so long suppressed.

"So! Your wife is dark, and you amuse yourself, forsooth, by painting beauties as fair as day-light," thought he. "Fortunately, this Teutonic dame is a beauty, and Aurélie is already disposed to be jealous. I have now means of enraging her against him; and angry women are easily managed. Bravo! I hold a flush of kings! But I will not lay down my cards, till I have got rid of Berthonie and Regnier. Thank heaven, that will be speedily done; and I may then render myself agreeable in their place."

Ere he entered the salon of Madame Colonge, the Baron assumed a becoming air of gravity and reserve.

"Well?" said the young wife impatiently, "was he in the studio?"

"He was, Madam," replied the Baron gravely, and Aurélie relieved of all doubt, breathed a sigh of satisfaction.

" He allowed you then to go in, and you saw the mysterious picture. What think you —is it worth the time he devotes to it?"

" Allow me to answer that question to-morrow."

" Why so?" exclaimed she eagerly.

" I require four and twenty hours, to clear up a point, which, if my suspicions prove founded, is important. To-morrow, on my return from the steeple chase, your curiosity shall be gratified."

The assumed gravity of the Baron roused the suspicions of Aurélie.

" Why not explain yourself directly?" said she, anxiously, unable to remain composed.

" Impossible! to-morrow you shall know all."

After a meditative pause, Madame Colonge observed, " to-morrow then, or never!"

" To-morrow for certain," replied the Baron, highly elated. " If she be so anxious without even an object," mused the traitor, " how will

it be when I prove that Colonge is in love with Madame de Grafhen ?"

After this Machiavelic reflection, the beau of forty-six took leave of the jealous wife, and quitted the room rejoicing in the prospect of a triumph.

## CHAPTER VI.

The following day, at about five o'clock, an elegant equipage was seen returning through the southern entrance of Paris; in which sat Madame Colonge by the side of Madame de Gabriel. In the back, sat Monsieur La Berthonie and the pensive poet, Felicien Regnier; close to the carriage, rode Monsieur de Livernais, followed by his servant. The countenances of these individuals offered the most extraordinary contrasts.

With an air of triumph and self-sufficiency, the Baron seemed to prance on his horse as majestically as Louis XIV in the square of the Place des Victoires. Aurélie was thoughtful and silent; while her more lively neighbour

manifested the playful vivacity peculiar to ladies of uncertain age, to whom their last glance at the looking-glass has been satisfactory. By turns gay and languishing, passing "from grave to gay, from pleasing to severe," she smiled, sighed, and would perhaps have blushed, could art have accomplished the miracle.

By the force of glances resembling the rolling fire of well-drilled infantry, Madame de Gabriel riddled the unhappy poet opposite; who unconsciously submitted to be victimized. To Regnier, the conduct of the two women was wholly inexplicable. Notwithstanding the presumptuous epistle he had slipped into her handkerchief, the conduct of Aurélie towards him was unchanged. He had anticipated the most electrifying results; and would evidently have preferred indications of resentment to such mortifying indifference. On the other hand, in spite of his vanity, he could not understand the provoking coquetry of Madame de Gabriel, to whom he had never dedicated what

he elegiacally called the sighs of his soul. "Are they laughing at me?" thought he, his eyes directing from the Viscountess to the artist's wife those intense and mysterious looks with which pale romantic young gentlemen are apt to qualify their vapid faces. Seated beside the poet, Monsieur La Berthonie, usually so brilliant, seemed as much lost in thought as the poet himself. A dandy would have attributed his air of discomfiture to the bespattered condition of his coat. But number nine of Madame Colonge's admirers, was superior to the irritation caused by a splash or two of mud; and the disastrous state of his outward man had but little to do with his clouded brow, and a silence as absolute as that of Madame Colonge.

As they entered Paris, Madame de Gabriel, after fluttering from twig to twig of the various branches of conversation, perched at last upon that of Italian literature.

"I was lately reading a translation of Pe-

trarch," said she, addressing a look of intelligence to Felicien Regnier, "and mean to resume my studies in Italian. Poetry loses much by translation. Do you like Petrarch, Monsieur Regnier?"

"After Dante, he is my favourite poet," replied the pallid youth.

"Dante, divine Dante! what genius," observed the Viscountess, raising her eyes languidly to heaven. "I lately saw a bust of him, with which I shall present myself."

"To such men, statues should indeed be raised!" replied Regnier, with prodigious emphasis.

"But, tell me," rejoined Madame de Gabriel, in a mellifluous voice, "do you really think that in the hearts of these divine poets, love occupies as much place as their works seem to indicate? I need not remind you, that sensibility is not the failing of superior minds—Lord Byron for instance!"

"In that point of view, I abandon Byron to

you—in all other respects my master! But as to the pure passion of Dante and Petrarch, there cannot be a shadow of doubt:—Laura and Beatrix to wit, the two brightest stars of poetry, without whom the glories of their lovers would seem incomplete. Genius without tenderness, would be a year without spring."

In pronouncing these words, which were repeated verbatim from his letter, the poet stole a glance at Aurélie, who with downcast eyes remained lost in meditation.

"Laura and Beatrix!" repeated Madame de Gabriel. "Alas! in those names there exists a perfume which women do well not to inhale too long. Still, if weakness were ever excusable, must it not be when purified, ennobled, and etherialised, by the poet's soul! How beautiful and seductive the image of the rose blooming on the laurel of beauty, immortalized by genius."

Felicien Regnier bounded from his seat; the last phrase of the Countess being extracted

word for word from the letter he had concealed in the folds of Madame Colonge's handkerchief. In utter bewilderment, he gazed upon the mature beauty who had rendered him quotation for quotation, almost resigned to the immortal honours his genius had called forth; till Madame de Gabriel, unable to endure his wild and penetrating glance, at length hung down her head, and gave a sigh such as is breathed by women striving to repress some powerful emotion.

"Mystery upon mystery!" thought the romantic poet. "The rose blooming upon the laurel is certainly mine, and not one of those trite ideas which present themselves to vulgar minds. There is a mystery in all this!"

The carriage arriving at the barrier, one of the officers went through the usual ceremony of opening the carriage for the *octroi*, which aroused Monsieur La Berthonie from his stupor.

"There are hackney coaches here," said he,

addressing himself to Madame de Gabriel. "I shall get into one; for I cannot think of your being seen in the streets of Paris with one so little presentable as I am."

"I will not hear of it," replied the Viscountess; "it is almost dark, and no one can see you."

In spite of the urbanity of these words, Madame de Gabriel earnestly desired to get rid of the fat man, splashed from head to foot, whose contact was productive of such disastrous consequences to the blue silk lining of her carriage. Monsieur La Berthonie, therefore, got out, and in passing before Felicien Regnier, whispered to him, "Come with me, I wish to speak with you!"

For some time, the sallow poet had been embarrassed by the incomprehensible allusions of the quadragenarian Viscountess, while Madame Colonge seemed unaware of his presence. Finding, therefore, that his object was not the least advanced by remaining, he acqui-

esced in the proposition of his friend, and left the carriage.

"What! You desert us too?" said Madame de Gabriel, with an air of surprise.

"I reside in the same direction as Monsieur La Berthonie," said the poet, vainly seeking a favourable look from Aurélie.

"Remember that you promised to come and read me your poem," replied the Viscountess. "I am dying for your 'Mists and Dews.'"

"A nice flower for the dew, truly!" thought the poet, following his companion; "she is old enough to be my mother!"

Before the two men had settled themselves in the coach, Monsieur de Livernais dismounted; and coming up to the carriage of Madame de Gabriel, and affecting an air of familiarity, stepped into it. This only served to increase the irritation of La Berthonie; who, grumbling betwixt his teeth, observed,

"Laugh, my friend, if you will! But tomorrow, it will be our turn."

"What have you to say to me," said the poet, as the coach rolled off.

"Nothing important. But I thought I should do you a service in withdrawing you from the fire of Madame de Gabriel. What a storm of red hot shot did she aim at you! If your heart be not a cullender, your epidermis must be bullet proof!"

"I thought you asleep."

"With one eye only. Do you know you are a dangerous man! Lovelace was nothing to you."

"I do not comprehend you," said the poet, caressing his leonine mane.

"Hear me!" said Monsieur La Berthonie, in a friendly tone. "Be sincere with me, and I will be equally so with you, which will be an advantage to both. That you may not persist in dissembling, accept a specimen of my sincerity. A few days ago, I greatly displeased you by my assiduities towards Madame Colonge."

"How so?" inquired indiscreetly Regnier.

"Allow me to finish. You supposed me to be your rival; and during eight and forty hours, were justified in so thinking. But now, you have no further cause for alarm. I withdraw, and wish you all possible success."

"This is a sudden change," said the poet, with a distrustful air.

"It is true," replied the other, "and yet easy to explain. I am the friend of Colonge, and cannot be guilty of any real treachery towards him."

"And probably your little mischance of today has somewhat prompted this virtuous determination!"

"You see then," said the fat man, "that between you and me, there can be no further cause for dispute."

"There never was. You fancied me attached to Madame Colonge."

"Nonsense, my dear fellow! I know some-

thing you cannot deny, which may prove the absurdity of your reserve."

"What reserve?" inquired Regnier, whose curiosity was highly excited.

"Did you not, the other day, possess yourself of the handkerchief of the lady in question?"

"The handkerchief of Madame Colonge?" exclaimed the poet, whose extreme agitation, caused his mane to vibrate on the collar of his coat.

"Was it *not* you?" inquired La Berthonie, equally surprised.

"I know not to what you allude!" replied Regnier, in such agitation that the fat man was almost convinced of his mistake.

"If you be not the culprit," said the latter, "I know but one man equal to such impertinence."

"Whom?" inquired the poet, in a hollow voice.

"The man we have just quitted, and who is now laughing at us;—Monsieur de Livernais."

"Most likely; it was for that he called me out of the room to speak to Madame de Gabriel."

"Did you keep the handkerchief?"

"I did! Better still."

"Better still?"

Regnier paused.

"Since you know nearly all, mystery is useless. I secreted a letter in it."

"I thought you wiser. Your letter, my dear Sir, instead of arriving at its address, fell into the hands of Monsieur de Livernais!"

"He shall restore it me, at the point of the sword!" exclaimed the poet.

"It is always wiser to be explicit," said La Berthonie, to whom the indignation of the poet seemed to afford infinite pleasure. "I myself have a difference to settle with Monsieur de Livernais. Between us, we may give him the lesson he deserves."

"But is he too in love with Madame Colonge? They were right in painting Love as blind."

"Yes, he is doubtless your rival."

"Our rival, you mean to say—my name is effaced from the list. I no longer count for one."

"Are you sincere?"

"Upon my honour; and the proof is, I will serve you without reserve. Should the affections of Madame Colonge be really assailable, I should bear with your triumph better than that of the superannuated coxcomb. His duplicity is outrageous. It is shameful to see how, with his professions of friendship, he dupes poor Colonge, who, with the usual ingenuousness of artists, sees no further than his nose. It is a second edition of Tartuffe and Orgon. But let him have a care, for I have something in store for him."

"He will not be more surprised than by the visit I intend to make him to-morrow," said the poet fiercely.

"Before two days are over, he shall be the jest of Paris!"

I shall certainly crop off his ears, if he do not restore to me both the letter and handkerchief."

While the two indignant gentlemen were mutually instigating each other to a signal vengeance on their common enemy, Livernais, the latter was quietly seated in Madame de Gabriel's carriage, laughing at their expense. The Viscountess tacitly encouraged the ridicule of Monsieur La Berthonie; but upon the pale faced poet being made the butt of his sarcasm, she became silent. This change of physiognomy did not escape the quick observation of the Baron, who instantly abstained.

"Good!" thought he. "She has swallowed the bait, and he will be clever if he get rid of her."

Before returning home, she dropped Aurélie, who on getting out of the carriage cast a significant glance at the Baron.

"I must speak to Colonge," said he, "do you think, Madam, I shall find him at home?"

"Most likely;" replied Aurélie, who on bidding adieu to the Viscountess, accepted the arm of Monsieur de Livernais, and proceeded up stairs.

On entering the room, Aurélie, ere she threw off her hat and shawl, abruptly addressed the Baron in a trembling voice, saying, "The twenty-four hours are elapsed! Speak, I beseech you!"

The Baron acquiesced. With a compassionate glance at the young wife, he addressed her in the following terms.

## CHAPTER VII.

"When I begged for a delay of twenty-four hours, Madam," said the Baron, "there existed a doubt, which I have since cleared up; —what was suspicion, is now certainty. My anxiety, far from diminishing, increases. The subject to which I allude, is of so delicate a nature, that I would fain crave permission to be silent."

"Explain yourself, I entreat," interrupted Madame Colonge, in great anxiety.

"*You* know whether I am your hushand's friend!" replied Monsieur de Livernais. "You have ever found me prompt in his defence, and even to-day, I do not despair of justification."

"What has he done?" exclaimed Aurélie. "Do you not see that I am in tortures?"

"Allow me to fulfil the duty dictated by my sincere friendship for Colonge. Were he a man of ordinary standing, I would not waste my time; but your husband is a distinguished painter, a man of eminent talents. To judge *him*, one must place oneself in his position. What is the predominating faculty of artists? —Imagination—which is of a restless and wandering nature, and would expire in the midst of peace and happiness; eschewing the most prosperous destiny, to stray into regions unknown. Suppose, for instance, that inestimable treasure, an all perfect woman!—Suppose, Madam, all you are yourself!—Even the incomparable treasure—even a perfect woman, would fail in attaching a man carried away by every gust of the imagination. What will be the result. Though nothing about you should change, though you might still be

loved, in the circles frequented by your husband, previous to his marriage, where you never go, there may exist a woman less beautiful than yourself, but possessed of other attractions."

"A woman?" exclaimed Aurélie.

"A woman, in whom," treacherously resumed the Baron, "may be united the contrasts required by the caprices of our sex. *Your* hair is dark; her's may be fair; your eyes are brown, her's may be blue; and in place of your exquisite paleness, she may display the vulgar bloom of early youth. Between you and this woman, there can be no comparison. Nevertheless, so fanciful is human nature, that the fervent imagination of the artist will abandon the worship of what is perfect, to adore that which is inferior; the disadvantage being compensated by the charm of novelty."

"Explain yourself more clearly," said

Aurélie. "In one word, of whom are you speaking? Who is the woman, you thus minutely describe?"

"I doubt whether you are acquainted with her—"

"Her name!"

"Her name, is Madame de Grafhen!" said the Baron, faintly, as if unwilling to offer too *sudden* a shock to the jealous woman.

"Madame de Grafhen?" repeated Aurélie, her eyes flashing fire. "Alas! she is indeed beautiful, far more more so than I am! He loves her then? You do well to warn me. But assertion does not suffice. I must have proofs."

"You will find them in the studio of Colonge."

"In the studio?"

"In the picture, on which he is at this moment occupied."

"Her portrait?" inquired the young woman, trembling.

"Her portrait!" replied Monsieur de Liver-

nais. "This is what I was desired to conceal from you. But of what avail would have been my discretion? You *must* see this picture, sooner or later. Was it not better to prepare you for the mortification which necessarily awaits you?"

"You are sure it is the portrait of that woman?"

"Yesterday I doubted, and went purposely to the Opera to see her. She was in her box, and I admit that the resemblance is wonderful. It is nothing new for an artist to paint the object of his affections," continued the Baron. "But in this painting, intended for the public gaze, thus to publish his passion for a married woman being himself married can only be accounted for by an idolatry bordering upon madness.—Colonge must have lost his senses, which ought to secure your forbearance; for in cool blood, he would never have outraged you thus."

Monsieur de Livernais watched the effect of these words; to which Aurélie, with colourless

and quivering lips, listened with the awe-struck countenance of a culprit hearing his sentence of death.

"I have afflicted you sorely," said he, with hypocritical suavity of voice. "Oh that I could have spared you such anguish! You *would* know the truth, and I told it, at the risk of giving you pain."

"I am indeed sick at heart," replied the horror-struck woman.

"Take courage, Madam! Do not give way! It is a mere momentary error on the part of Colonge. He will soon feel his wrongs, and sue for forgiveness at your feet. Your grief is doubtless natural, but will avail you nothing in this ill-deserved affliction. My words surprise you, I perceive. Young, beautiful, uniting all that can attract or charm, you do not understand that the happiness of being yours, can excuse anything. But remember that men of genius, artists above all, must not be judged by any ordinary criterion. They are wandering

stars which no human power can arrest in their course. Sick of present felicity, their imagination requires the strange, the distant, the unknown. In Colonge's place, any one else would have devoted himself to please you and become worthy of you by an undivided adoration. I speak only after my own heart. Any other would have loved you as you deserve to be loved, fervently, solely, eternally. If he have not done so, it is that the power of feeling such devotion, such abnegation, is incompatible with the ambition, more or less selfish, which serves as the stimulus of genius. Independent of the existence Colonge shares with you, which should afford him sufficient happiness, he has another destiny to accomplish, for himself alone; thus abstracting from you a part of his existence, while you surrender yours to him, entirely. You have, alas! only to conform to the imperious laws peculiar to his vocation. You must not judge him too severely, since his errors are the inevitable re-

sult of his position. Every tree must bear its fruit. To exact fidelity of a man of talent, would be, as Madame de Gabriel says, to seek roses on the laurel."

Monsieur de Livernais persisted some time longer in criminating the character of the painter, while pretending to suggest excuses for his supposed infidelity. In listening to the perfidious reasoning of the Baron, Aurélie, far from feeling her anguish subside, suffered only more acutely.

"So then!" said she, "I am become nothing in his existence! To have possessed his heart a year, perhaps, is more than I had the right to expect. If he betray me, it is not his fault, but mine. Doubtless he retains some sort of affection for me; but I can no longer captivate his imagination, and it is, therefore, just he should seek in another the charm that fails in me! Such are the consolations offered to me!"

Those who would reap must sow. Such was the creed of the wily Baron.

"I have prepared my way," thought he; "which must suffice for the present. I must wait a few days, for the declaration of my attachment."

Resolved not to mar his success by precipitation, he took leave of Aurélie; who, in her perturbation of mind, was scarcely aware of his departure. Suddenly, the jealous woman recovered from her stupor.

"It is impossible!" cried she; "I must see this to believe it."

Rushing out of the room, she proceeded towards the studio; but on her way, was met by her husband, who had quitted his palette upon hearing that she was returned. She was, therefore, obliged to renounce her intention. Several visits in the evening, interfered with her project; but next day, heart broken by the vain effort of subduing her fears, she sent for her husband who, as was his custom, had been painting since early morning.

"I regret to disturb you," said she, assum-

ing a calm and conciliatory air, such as women can display even in their most poignant sufferings. "I must beg you to dress, and proceed to Madame de Gabriel's."

"To Madame de Gabriel's?" replied the astonished artist.

"Yesterday, I promised to drive out with her; but I feel unwell, and cannot go out. I wish you to go to her, that she may not be kept waiting."

"Can you not write to her?"

"She will think me lazy and be angry. But if you go yourself, she will believe you, and you owe her ten visits at least."

"What is the use of putting me to all this inconvenience?" said the painter, unwilling to be disturbed for so unnecessary a purpose.

"Inconvenience? a visit to a charming woman?" replied Aurélie, with a forced smile; "Be more gallant! Go and dress yourself, and away."

"As it is your wish, I go," said Colonge, "I only trust I may not find her at home."

Aurélie watched his departure from a window, opening towards the street; and before the cabriolet was out of sight, hastened to the studio. In the outer room, she met Colonge's servant, the only person privileged to enter the sanctuary, who was just then trying to give a more orderly air to the scattered collection of busts, arms, and casts, strewed about the room. On seeing his mistress approach, he remained motionless with a partizan in one hand and an arquebuse in the other.

"Open that door!" said Aurélie, pointing to the entrance of the studio.

The servant hesitated.

"I would willingly obey you, Madam," replied he, "but the orders of my master—"

"Open that door!" repeated Aurélie, imperatively.

Between the contradictory orders of a husband and wife, an intelligent servant never hesitates; he must obey the wife, to save the husband from reproof. The artist's valet-de-chambre conformed strictly to this rule of

policy. Laying down the weapons, he opened the door of the mysterious sanctuary, and carefully closed it as Aurélie entered.

"Should my master return, he will not eat me, I suppose," said he; and continued to repair the chaotic disorder of the room. About to ascertain the truth of the accusation against her husband, Madame Colonge paused from intense agitation; her knees gave way and her heart beat with such violence, that she was forced to press it with her hand to subdue its pulsations, as she advanced towards the painting. Among the figures crowded on the canvass, one alone seemed to court her eye. As the eagle singles with a glance its victim from the flock, did the eyes dark of Aurélie fix themselves upon the youthful and expressive face of her she thought her rival. On recognizing Madame de Grafhen, her blood seemed frozen in her veins; and thus petrified, she supported herself mechanically against a chair. By degrees, she recovered; and the jealous wife

stood motionless before the picture, contemplating the azure eyes, fair hair, graceful features, of a being formed for adoration.

Enchanted with this magnificent head, Colonge had lavished on it the whole resources of his genius; bestowing upon every detail, the most minute and studied care. It was the gem of his picture, to the polishing of which, he had dedicated days and nights. In his rare moments of self-confidence, in the golden hour of hope, when, giving way to the secret ambition of his soul, he conversed with futurity, he had sometimes murmured to himself, "This head alone will immortalize me!"

Maddened by jealousy, with the spring of a leopard rushing on its prey, Aurélie now seized the palette, and substituted a black patch for the portrait of Madame de Grafhen.

"Let him come!" cried she, regarding with wild triumph her work of ruin! At that moment, her husband's voice was heard without.

" It is he!" exclaimed Aurélie, with rage and indignation.

But before the painter opened the door, Madame Colonge had concealed herself behind a curtain, which masked the extremity of the studio.

## CHAPTER VIII.

On returning from Madame de Gabriel's, Colonge proceeded to the apartment of his wife, to acquaint her with the accomplishment of his mission, and not finding her, thought she must be gone out, and mutely cursing the endless caprice of womankind in matters of health, proceeded towards his studio. As was his custom, he crossed the ante-room without stopping, and carefully closing the studio door, stood before his picture, from which he had only been an hour absent. The horrible mask applied to the face of his lovely heroine, made him start back with horror. He fancied himself the dupe of some fiendish hallucination,

and doubting the evidence of his eyes, stood transfixed before his work.

"Louis!" shouted he, forgetting that he had locked himself into the room. Instead of answering, the man crept down stairs, saying,

"I was sure he would storm! But as my mistress is still there, let them settle it together!"

The demure decorum of the age does not admit of those deadly hatreds and ardent jealousies which, in the poetical times of the middle ages, often prompted the artist to exchange the pencil for the sword. Now-a-days, more ink than blood is spilt in such affairs.

There is more criticism, and less fighting; and the ferocious measures resorted to by the competitors of the great masters, would revolt their less skilful but more polished successors.

Though Colonge could not boast of the good will of his fellow artists, he had never supposed the possibility of a secret enemy

so envious of his talent as to be capable of gratifying at all hazards, a despicable hatred. For the first time, the painful idea of some secret foe presented itself to his mind.

"A rival only could be guilty of such an infamy!" thought he, contemplating the disaster. "He has, indeed, struck home! My divine, my beautiful figure, a figure which, to be an angel, wanted only wings—to be mutilated and polluted, by the hand of a ruffian!—I will seek him, though concealed in the bowels of the earth. Woe betide him—doubly woe betide him!—His life shall pay for it!"

"Take mine, then!"—exclaimed Aurélie, rushing forward from her concealment.

On beholding his wife, whose eyes, attitude, and voice, announced the ungovernable frenzy of jealousy, Colonge stood confounded.

"Aurélie," faltered he, "*who* has done this?"

"It was I!" said she, in a concentrated voice.

"How had my picture offended you? You have destroyed the work of at least a week!"

"Hear me!" said Aurélie. "You find me here for the last time. On quitting this room, I return to my father. When I am gone, you may paint your divinity at leisure. But till then, I will not endure such insults. To deceive me was enough—to insult me is too much!"

"Insult you?—deceive you? What do you mean?" cried the astonished Colonge.

Madame Colonge looked scornfully at her husband.

"Though I hate you," said she, "do not force me to despise you. Of what avail this deceit? Do I not recognize Madame de Grafhen?"

"You are jealous, then?" exclaimed the painter, all but consoled for the catastrophe. "What folly! what madness! Because one of the figures in my painting resembles her, you

are jealous of a woman to whom I never spoke in my life."

"It is false!" said Aurélie, furiously. "You love her!—I know it! You have never spoken to her? Perhaps you will also tell me you have painted her portrait without having seen her?"

"I speak the truth! I thought to do something most unimportant, and have apparently committed a crime."

"Was it here, or at home, she gave you a sitting?" inquired the agonized wife.

"No where, I swear to you. Of what are you dreaming? My design required the head of a blonde; that of Madame de Grafhen suited me, and I adopted it, as I might have done that of a child, or an old man. If I have done wrong, it was, at least, unintentionally."

"Good!" retorted Aurélie, with an incredulous smile. "It is, therefore, without the con-

sent of Madame de Grafhen that you painted her portrait?"

"It may be an indiscretion; but, in that case, she alone has a right to complain."

"And you painted her portrait from memory? She did not sit?"

"Never!"

"I cannot believe it," said Madame Colonge. "When you painted *my* portrait, you required eight long sittings, which you thought too little."

"Because it *was* your portrait," replied the artist, smiling. "We were not married then. I had not the right of seeing you when I chose. How could I ever think the sittings sufficient, which brought me so near you?"

Though jealousy be in general both blind and deaf, Aurélie was struck by the calm and affectionate tone in which her husband tried to justify himself.

"You cannot make me believe it possible to paint thus from memory," said she, after a slight pause.

"Many painters possess the same faculty. Devoted to the study of nature, we retain the impression of objects, with greater facility than others."

"That of pretty women especially it appears!"

"If you doubt what I say," replied Colonge with a smile, "it is easy enough to convince yourself."

The painter then took up a pencil, and opening an album, sat down beside a small table.

"What are you going to do?" inquired Aurélie, her curiosity much excited by these preliminaries.

"*Your* portrait from memory. Is not that the subject of our discussion?"

Instead of answering, Aurélie placed herself behind her husband.

"Bravo!" said the artist. "*Now*, I cannot deceive you."

The painter then commenced his difficult

task. He first sketched the pure oval, which characterized Aurélie's face; then, one by one, portrayed the features of her charming countenance. Sometimes he paused, with eyes half closed, contemplating in the bottom of his soul, as in an invisible mirror, some feature difficult to describe. But his hesitation was short; for soon, the magic line, the almost impossible expression, appeared unerringly on the paper. The sketch finished, Colonge retouched every line with fervent solicitude. Already the resemblance was incontestable. He had represented her to the life;—her vivid eyes—her contemplative forehead—the smile of the lips, all beaming with youth and beauty.

"What think you now?"—said the artist, turning towards his wife.

Aurélie, leaning over her husband's shoulder, sought in vain some pretext for criticism.

"You are right!" said she drily. "I can no longer doubt your talent; so that if a face

have the good fortune to please you, it requires little effort to retain the memory of it; and thus you preserve the portraits of all the ladies who have been honoured with your attention!"

"The plain as well as the beautiful," replied Colonge, trying to appease the storm gathering on the brow of Aurélie.

"The plain!—Do you ever look at them?"

"A painter must study all, and every thing. Shall I sketch an ugly woman for you?"

"As you please!" replied Aurélie with affected indifference.

He accordingly resumed his pencil, and making a rapid sketch, handed it to his wife.

"Madame de Gabriel!" said she, half laughing, in spite of herself. "If she only knew how you treat her!"

"You admit then, that it is not love, but memory. Perhaps you think me in love with Madame de Gabriel?"

"Swear to me, on your honour, that you are not in love with Madame de Grafhen?"

"By my honour and my love, I swear!" said the artist, eagerly pressing her hand to his lips.

"If I forgive all the pain you have caused me, will you ever subject me again to such an ordeal?"

"Never!"—replied Colonge, glancing at his injured painting. "It costs me too dear!"

"Among the other figures," said Aurélie, "are there any portraits?"

"Not one," answered the artist, alarmed by the possibility of some fresh disaster.

"There are some faces really beautiful!"

"Mere efforts of imagination. I trust you are not jealous of them. They are purely imaginary."

"You do not know what jealousy is!" faltered Aurélie, almost in tears.

"Are you *sure?*"—

"*You* have too much to think of. A man of sense is superior to such frivolities. While

painting for posterity, how are you to find a moment for jealousy?"

Colonge sighed deeply as he reflected upon the hours of bitter anguish he had endured from the very feeling of which his wife pronounced him incapable.

"You must now be reasonable," said he changing the conversation, "for it will be the fifth time I have begun that figure."

"Do not presume to search your memory then, for a model!" said Aurélie, archly.

"Where am I to find one, then?—Have you not forbidden me to draw from nature?"

"I did not forbid you to draw from *me*."

"*Your* portrait in this painting?"

"Why not?—Am I too ugly?"

"You do not think of such a thing!"

"So much so, that I positively exact it!" replied Aurélie, gravely.

"It does not suit me."

"It suited you to paint Madame de Grafhen."

"But——"

"But it *must* be so. You owe it me, in compensation for all I have suffered. In a word, *my* head, or none!"

"Or *none?*"—said Colonge, contemplating his wife with an air of stupefaction. Aurélie sat down opposite the window.

"Since I am here," said she. "I will immediately give you a sitting.—Am I properly seated?"

Perceiving the inutility of further remonstrance with a woman suffering under the fever of jealousy, and fearing further exasperation, he placed himself before the easel, pretending to work; then examined with a sigh the havoc made in his picture.

"I did not ask for this proof of attachment!" thought he, trying to console himself; "but provided she love me, what signifies the rest?"

While considering how he could repair the damage to his painting, Colonge was struck

with a sudden idea. He remembered Timanthes vainly endeavouring to express the grief of Agamemnon, and replacing by a veil the face he found himself incapable of portraying.

"Why should I not imitate the example?" thought the painter, "why resist an invincible difficulty?—By lengthening the drapery of the aged figure, I arrive at the same result as Timanthes. It is only a head the less. It was beautiful, certainly; but the body remains, which has also some merit. My enemies will assert that I failed in my intentions; but they know not what it is to possess a jealous wife, and a wife one loves."

In certain dilemmas decision cannot be too prompt. Colonge adopted the maxim by putting his newly conceived idea into execution. At the end of half an hour, Aurélie, at whom her husband occasionally looked, as if actually painting her portrait, fatigued with her sedentary position, suddenly rose.

"Let me see it!" said she, looking at the picture; where, instead of her own face, she found the skirt of a blue cloak, placing in the relief the beautiful figure of which he had contrived to conceal the head with the exception of the hair and forehead.

"Is *this* my portrait?"—said she, looking angrily at her husband.

"*Your* portrait?" repeated Colonge. "Do you suppose I would expose, to the gaze of the idle crowd during three months at the Louvre, the features and expression I so dearly love? Rather never touch a brush again!—Rather cut my hand off! It is already too much that you frequent the showy circles so dear to *you*, so hateful to me.—You fancy I am incapable of jealousy!—If you only knew!"

Aurélie, touched by these words, reclined her head upon her husband's shoulder.

"You think to please me in making this confession," said she. "But you cannot deceive

me. To be jealous, one must be anxious—imagine a thousand follies—be capable of a thousand absurdities!—And *you* are so calm! Since we married, you have never once made a comment upon the persons who seek my society. It seems to interest you so little that I myself refrain from talking to you on the subject."

"Perhaps it is unnecessary."

"You wish to make me believe that you are on the watch unknown to me. Will you lay me a wager? More than once this season, I have been told that I am beautiful, clever, and attractive; in fact all that is generally said in such cases. I have been making conquests, while you were losing rubbers at whist. Martyr of jealousy as you pretend to be, I defy you to name one of them!"

"Not only one, but all!"

Aurélie started, and tried to discover whether her husband were serious.

" I should love you too much if I could believe it," said she; " but you are laughing at me."

Colonge rose, and taking her by the hand, led her to the painting.

" Can an artist be more humiliated?" said he smiling. " You have proved to me that, with the exception of the head of Madame de Grafhen, you have not deigned to bestow the slightest attention on my composition. There is cause for some interest, if you will only look. You may afterwards be less eager to bet."

While eyeing the picture, the countenance of Aurélie betrayed inexpressible astonishment, as she detected in the Teutonic garb, the ridiculous faces of Messieurs de Mariendorf, Don Antonio de Puertes y Cabra, Roquaincourt, La Berthonie, Felicien Regnier and others; in fact, the whole brigade of her admirers, past and present. Though guiltless and irreproachable, she blushed on beholding the enumeration of the list.

"Who has lost?—" inquired Colonge, maliciously pleased by her embarrassment.

"I am growing afraid of you," she replied, without looking him in the face.

"So much the better for me. You will henceforward respect my paintings."

"Are you a sorcerer?" inquired she anxiously.

"A husband had need be so."

"And you saw through all?"

"There was no great difficulty in the discovery."

"Do not laugh, for I assure you I think most seriously of all this. What a strange man you are to observe me thus, without breathing a word!"

"That is my secret. Be assured that not a movement of your's escapes me; that I see all—know all;—read your very thoughts—and that, if you deceived me——"

"You would be the death of me?"—cried Aurélie anxiously.

"I would be the death of you!" said Colonge, with much composure.

"I am satsfied!—You are dearer to me than ever!"—exclaimed the young wife, throwing her arms round her husband's neck. A noise in the adjoining room and several slight taps at the door, interrupted this tender embrace.

"It is I!" cried Monsieur de Livernais. "I know you are within, Colonge! Open the door, I have something amusing to tell you."

The artist, caring just then but little for the communications of his treacherous confidant, made a sign to his wife to be silent. But Aurélie experienced an eager desire to hear what the Baron had to say to her husband.

"Let him come in," said she. "I will retire to my hiding place. Above all, do not let him know that I am here."

While she concealed herself behind the curtain, Colonge hesitated. At length, he opened the door.

"The Bastille is not so well guarded, as your studio!"—observed Livernais, as he entered.

Holding Colonge by the hand, the Baron advanced towards the picture; and with astonished eyes, sought in vain the figure of the fair German.

"Am I blind?"—said he, "where on earth is Madame de Grafhen?"

"Behind yonder cloak!"—answered the artist.

"What sacrilege!—To blot out so perfect, so inimitable a head!—Are you mad?"

"What will Aurélie think!" mused the Baron. "She will fancy I have been making game of her, and I shall be in disgrace for a week."

Deploring the catastrophe which at once annihilated his treacherous projects, the Baron reflected that the net is not lost, though a few meshes be torn; and putting on a good countenance, sat down, while

Colonge was preparing his brushes and palette.

"Well!"—said the latter beginning to paint. "Now for your amusing story!"

"Cannot you guess?"—replied the Baron striving to appear cheerful. "What can it be—but the absurd position of Messieurs La Berthonie and Regnier."

"So, so!"—said Colonge glancing in the direction of his wife.—"What has happened?"

"There is an end of them both!"

"Indeed? You make quick work of translating people from life to death. You must give me your recipe. Pray be less mysterious. We are alone;—be sure that *I* shall not betray you."

"My dear fellow, since you insist upon knowing, my method is simple enough. Listen! Even as Achilles was invulnerable in all parts but the heel, the strongest man has in his position, character, mind, or person, some part equally weak with the heel of Achilles. It is there one must strike!"

"To continue your metaphor," said the painter, "where lies the heel of La Berthonie?"

"In his corpulence. He is clever, quick and artful, but coarse and portly. His obesity constitutes his assailable point."

"In what way?"

"Conscious of having exposed himself by dancing, he failed in his usual conversational efforts; and I had no difficulty in encouraging him in a disastrous course which terminated in the following catastrophe.—Yesterday, I purposely mounted Griselda; who, in rearing and frisking, is surpassed by few. La Berthonie, seated by the side of Madame de Gabriel, was as usual doing the agreeable to Madame Colonge, who was placed opposite to him. On approaching Berny, I, who am never fatigued, begged the fat gentleman to mount my horse a moment, in order that I might rest myself. He accepted; and scarcely was in the saddle, before my groom put spurs to his horse and made across a field,

feigning to be run away with. Griselda of course followed; and then, my dear Sir, ensued a scene well worthy of your pencil. Imagine La Berthonie, rolling in his saddle like a boat on the waves, from side to side, from head to tail; his hair and coat streaming in the wind, and at length grasping the neck of his steed;—having lost his stirrups, his whip, his saddle, his hat, his head, and being finally dropped into the voluptuous bed of a muddy ditch, into which my groom most artfully seduced him."

"But you must have placed his life in jeopardy?" said Colonge, humanely.

"Far worse!—I might have lamed poor Griselda, who is not used to carry elephants."

The two men laughed heartily; while Aurélie, no less amused, could with difficulty constrain herself.

"After such a performance," continued the Baron, "a man, had he the wit of Voltaire, must have become ridiculous. Women have

little mercy upon the absurd; and poor pursy La Berthonie rolling in the mud, was the very acme of absurdity, I promise you!"

"And Achilles II,—Felicien Regnier, has he also a vulnerable point?" demanded the artist.

"Heel from head to foot!" replied Livernais, with contempt. "Regnier is ill-bred, vain, awkward, and sensitive. I could strike where I liked. So sure in fact am I of my game, that I quietly slipped his neck into the first noose at hand."

"And which may that have been?"—

"The arms of Madame de Gabriel."

"Of Madame de Gabriel?"—exclaimed the artist, his wife eagerly listening.

"Even so," replied the Baron; "and I undertake to say, that the noose will prove effective. The excellent Viscountess, in spite of her rouge, and false hair, still retains the fervour of youth."

"Well?"

"Well! I behaved like a friend to her.

Previous to resigning herself to the decorum of old age, I secured her the first sighs of an ingenuous youth."

"Explain yourself?"

"Madame de Gabriel is named Aurélie—as well as your wife."

"And what then?"

"Do you not see my plan of campaign? Well, well, since I must be explicit, to introduce these sympathising souls to each other, I had only to pass a note from one handkerchief to another."

"It was Madame de Gabriel then, who received Regnier's *billet-doux?*"—exclaimed the artist, laughing

"With gratitude!—It is so consolatory for declining beauty to become once more the object of a volcanic passion! The Viscountess has, for these two days, been lost in a dream of happiness. She is grown ten years younger—sighs profoundly—ruminates upon the setting sun—the fall of the leaf—zephyrs—moonlight—and sympathy of souls!"

"Is Regnier really a poet?"

"I should imagine not; for yesterday, while gazing upon her withered face, he became lost in bashful stupefaction."

"But he will soon discover the mystification, and escape the gratuitous chains of Madame de Gabriel."

"I defy him; he is a prisoner for ages to come. She is obstinately determined upon becoming the Beatrix of the new Dante."

The idea of Madame de Gabriel as a Beatrix and the muse of the poet with the flowing mane, provoked the merriment of Aurélie to such a degree, that her laughter nearly betrayed her.—At that moment, there came a loud knock at the door.

## CHAPTER IX.

The mirth excited by the foregoing recital was so vehement, that Colonge could not refuse admission to the individual desirous to enter; but he first drew a curtain across his painting, placed there in order to screen it from obtrusive eyes.

The door opened. Colonge who had assumed his usual gravity, could with difficulty preserve it on recognising the heroic rider whose absurd adventure the Baron had been just describing.

"Is it you, La Berthonie? I am glad to see you. I feared your accident of yesterday would force you to keep your room."

"The Baron has related to you then, his facetious frolic?—It was perhaps the subject of the roars of laughter, I heard coming up stairs?"

"What do you mean by *frolic?*"—inquired the Baron.

"The two rivals eyed one another like wrestlers about to begin the death-struggle: the one glorying in preceding triumphs—the other evincing the hope of a speedy revenge.

"I allude," said he, "to your abominable trick of mounting me upon a vicious horse, for which I am come hither to demand satisfaction."

At this declaration of war, pronounced in a firm impressive voice, the Baron, as well as the painter, became serious in a moment.

"You laugh no longer;—I fear I am a spoil-sport?"—said La Berthonie, gazing from one to the other. "You were merry enough just now."

"We are always so," replied Colonge,

watching the physiognomy of his two friends.

"In that case, laugh away!" said the portly gentleman ensconcing himself comfortably in a chair.

"But at what?"—observed Colonge.

"You mean at *whom*."

"At every body. The best way of offending no one."

"If you choose, you may commence with me.

"Upon condition that we each have our turn," said the artist good humouredly.

"Of course," replied La Berthonie; "make yourselves easy. You will lose nothing by waiting. But as regards myself, what saint do you think I resemble?"

"What *saint?*" cried the painter.

"St. Paul, I should imagine," observed the Baron, "for St. Paul was corpulent and thick set."

"Unlike many others, who are thick only in the head," replied La Berthonie, not the least daunted by his sarcasm. "But

that is *not* the point of resemblance, to which I allude. You are aware that the conversion of St. Paul took place after a fall from his horse, in journeying to Damascus. Since my mischance in tumbling from the mare of Monsieur de Livernais, I too have become a penitent. I accept it as a humiliation; and am come, my dear Colonge, in great contrition, to confess the wrongs of which I have been guilty towards you."

No sooner had Monsieur La Berthonie assumed an air of compunction, than the Baron betrayed a vague anxiety.

"My confession will doubtless appear strange," said the portly gentleman, in a hypocritical tone. "Rarely does it fall to the lot of husbands to hear such truths. You will be indignant; but I trust the frankness of my proceeding, as well as the sincerity of my remorse, will win my pardon. Know then, my dear Colonge, that, forgetting the holy tie of friendship between us, I have deeply injured you by a guilty project. Let the rare love-

liness of Madame Colonge plead my excuse."

Involuntarily the eyes of the painter looked towards the curtain, behind which Aurélie was attentively listening.

"What has Madame Colonge to do with your confession?" — inquired the artist eagerly; while the Baron was folding up a cigarillo.

"Alas! my dear friend," said La Berthonie, with a deep sigh; "there lies the secret of my fault. For this last fortnight, have I secretly cherished in my heart, a guilty passion, which I now bitterly deplore!"

"You amaze me," said the husband, with perfect composure.

"He knew all," thought La Berthonie, noticing the unconcern of the artist. "*Who* has betrayed me?—It must be that designing knave, Livernais, whose treachery authorizes me to be little scrupulous.—My confession is at an end!" said he, aloud. "I repeat to you

that I am deeply conscious of my crime, and hope to find you merciful and magnanimous. I am on the point of starting for Italy, which must at once convince you of the sincerity of these professions."

"What say you, Baron?"—demanded Colonge, with a malicious smile. "Must we pardon him?"

"Be merciful!" replied Monsieur de Livernais, looking at his former rival, as much as to say, you see I am pleading in your favour, so do not treat me as an enemy.

"Receive absolution," said Colonge cheerfully. "Repentance such as yours, is too rare not to merit forgiveness."

La Berthonie seized the hand of the artist.

"What greatness of soul!"—cried he, "Augustus pardons Cinna!—Baron," he resumed, "can you remain unmoved by such a spectacle? Does not your heart tell you that the joys of friendship are the purest man can taste? Come, come! yield to the generous inspiration

I read in your eyes. If you could but know the delight of shaking in full sincerity a friend by the hand! Colonge is generous. At the first word of repentance, you see, his arms will be open, even to you!"

"Parry that thrust if you can," thought the fat gentleman, at the end of his pathetic allocution.

"I do not exactly understand you," replied the Baron, much embarrassed.

"Baron, Baron—I thought better of you. What! when I—your junior—furnish you with a good example, you persist in the work of darkness? You are too hardened! Are you, then, resolved to die unreformed?"

"Sir," faltered Livernais, in agony, "if you have any thing important to communicate, allow me to propose an explanation in my own house."

"Why not here?" said Colonge; "there is nobody to interfere."

"Come come, La Berthonie, what has our friend Livernais done, that you threaten him thus?"

"What has he done? Did not his horse, at the risk of breaking my neck, bring about my conversion? Would you have me forget such a service? or can I better testify my gratitude than by saving him from the abyss, in which I was myself immersed only yesterday? Ay, Baron! You may frown and look fierce; but I am resolved to restore you to virtuous feelings, in spite of yourself. As we were alike sinners, let us be alike penitents! Since you were as ambitious as myself of shining in the eyes of Madame Colonge—like me."

"This exceeds all endurance, Sir," interrupted the Baron, trembling with rage, "you know not what you are saying."

"You are mistaken. I assure you that I know perfectly well what I am saying, and equally understand your vexation. Can you

deny being in love with the charming wife of our friend?"—

"Colonge!" exclaimed the Baron; "I am amazed how you can suffer such indecorum in your own house! Pray put an end to this folly!"—

Unable to parry the rude assault of his rival, the Baron adroitly called to his aid the man he was accused of betraying;—a step which perfectly succeeded.

"Monsieur de Livernais is right," said Colonge, addressing himself to La Berthonie; "this discussion appears to me altogether superfluous. The name of my wife is out of place here, and I entreat you to put an end to the discussion."

"Since you choose to remain blind, far be it from me to intrude upon you the means of regaining your powers of vision;" replied the stout gentleman with a smile. "If you are resolved to warm the serpent in your bosom, do it, and welcome! Some people choose

to be stung to the quick; since you are of the number, as the peasant said to Cleopatra, 'I wish you joy of your asp.' However, since you will not accept my succour as an auxiliary, receive my defiance as a fair and open foe! Let us all do our worst, since our worst pleases you;—and so, my service to you both."

Monsieur La Berthonie, ever cool and collected, bowed courteously to the two gentlemen, and left the room, humming an air of the Cenerentola. Scarcely was he on the staircase, when the Baron rejoined him.

'At what o'clock are you to be found at home?"—said he significantly.

"Always until three," said the other abruptly.

"Good!—To-morrow, then, I will be with you."

"I shall have the honour of expecting you," was the reply;—and the two rivals parted.

While La Berthonie descended the stairs, humming his tune with still more energy than before, the Baron paused at the door of the studio, in which the painter and his wife were carrying on the following dialogue.

"Are you not infinitely amused?" inquired Colonge of his wife, as he opened the curtain behind which she had been concealed.

"Certainly—but the affair is not over."

"On the contrary—merely beginning."

"What will come next?"

"A duel, perhaps."

"You think it possible they will fight?"

"Unless you succeed in bringing them to reason; which will not be easy, for they are furious, especially Livernais, naturally enraged at being so calumniated."

"Calumniated?" exclaimed Aurélie.

Instead of replying, the artist redrew the curtains; and just in time, for the Baron now re-entered the room. The two men surveyed

each other with astonishment, well assumed if not genuine.

"What say you to all this?"—said the Baron, crossing his arms.

"That I can make neither head nor tail of it!" replied Colonge, imitating the same attitude. "Could you have supposed La Berthonie capable of such ———?"

"No, I confess it exceeds all I could have imagined."

"What deceit—what hypocrisy!"

"Tartuffe was an angel compared with him."

"What think you of the new system of turning away accusation, by becoming an accuser? To wish to deprive me of your esteem!"

"To attribute to you his own perfidy; and embroil two friends like us!"

"Abominable!"

"Infamous!"—After exhausting their litany of abuse, the two friends paused for breath.

"I trust, my dear Colonge, that the absurdities you have just heard, will yield no prejudice to our mutual terms of friendship," said the Baron.

"For what do you take me?" replied the painter;—"do I not know your excellence?"

"If one is to believe Beaumarchais, calumny always leaves its trace behind!"

"How is it possible to credit the word of a man who makes accusations purely to avenge himself!"

"How indeed! I am overjoyed at your seeing the real motive of his conduct. Your opinion then regarding me is not the least changed?"

"Not in the slightest degree!" replied Colonge, taking the Baron's hand; "I have exactly as much confidence in you to-day, as I had yesterday."

"Go and be hanged, La Berthonie!" thought the Baron, enchanted by the good faith

of his friend; "know that it requires a mightier power than yours to open the eyes of the blind."

Madame Colonge, growing impatient, now nearly betrayed her concealment. She began to perceive the complicated knavery of which she had been the object. Monsieur de Livernais had conducted himself so artfully and with such caution, that, deceived by the semblance of sincere and respectful admiration, she had never a moment mistrusted him.

Grateful for the friendly offices of the Baron, she had sanctioned an increasing intimacy which, by imperceptible progress, was attaining all the force and privileges of friendship. By one word, Monsieur La Berthonie had rent the veil so artfully woven by his rival, through which the light now penetrated. A thousand insignificant trifles, hitherto misunderstood, now stood forth in their real meaning, and presented themselves to the mind of the undeceived woman. In propor-

tion as she saw clear, her husband's blindness became incomprehensible. As charmed as she had been with his jealous fit an hour before, was she now shocked at the childish credulity with which he received the hypocritical protestations of Monsieur de Livernais.

"If he loved me," thought she, "or were he as jealous as he pretends, could he be thus easily deceived?"

While indignant at the Baron's perfidy, her husband appeared in a light almost ridiculous. She felt half inclined to rush from behind the curtain into the presence of the two astonished men, bid the Baron quit the house, then, enjoy the pleasure of reproving and enlightening her husband. But this was impossible. What would the Baron think of her being concealed as a listener? Fortunately for Aurélie, there was a door by which she could retire unseen; taking advantage of which, she departed, to return in an instant afterwards, by the usual entrance of the studio.

Colonge, unprepared for this manœuvre, meekly waited the result, while the Baron coolly and politely accosted her.

"I am glad to find you here, Sir," said Aurélie, to the Baron. "I want to scold you. Where is the album you promised to bring me?"

Monsieur de Livernais tapped his forehead, as people do when reminded of forgetfulness.

"I must have lost my senses," replied he. "This morning I went purposely to my library to seek it; I will send it you this evening."

"This evening?" observed Aurélie, apparently disappointed.

"I will go for it this moment," replied the Baron, taking up his hat.

"I regret the trouble I am giving you," said Aurélie; "but when you said this evening, I understood it as a mere pretext; and patience is not a preeminent quality in woman."

The Baron bowed, and departed with the obsequious complaisance of a lover.

Darting into his cabriolet, and taking the shortest road, he soon made his way to his drawing-room; where, to his astonishment, he discovered Regnier stretched upon his divan, in the attitude of a lion fiercely awaiting his prey.

## CHAPTER X.

The Baron manifested more emotion than might have been expected from a man of the world, when Regnier rose, and after a cold and formal bow, accosted him.

"Excuse the liberty of my having established myself during your absence, Sir," said he; "your servant informed me that you returned to dinner, and as my business will admit of no delay, I presumed to wait for you."

"You did well!" replied Livernais, wondering aside what could be the object of his inopportune visit. "Does he want me to listen to some of his abominable verses?" thought he.

"I will not detain you long, Sir," said the poet.

"Proceed, I beg of you," replied the Baron, motioning him to sit down.

But Regnier pompously refused the offered seat.

"Allow me, Sir, to put a question to you;" said he, abruptly. "I doubt not of finding the frankness usual in men of honour."

"To the point, pray!" retorted the Baron, growing impatient.

"The point is this," said the poet, with still greater deliberation. "I hear that, at the ball of Madame de Gabriel, you obtained possession of a lady's handkerchief containing a letter. Is this true?"

The Baron, startled by this sudden attack, in spite of his usual presence of mind, felt embarrassed. Truth may be inconvenient, but the humiliation of a lie is insupportable. Without hesitation, the Baron, who if devoid of principle lacked not courage, determined upon risking the simple truth.

"It is the fact," said he; "you have been

rightly informed. At the ball to which you allude to, I accidently found a handkerchief, exquisitely embroidered, containing a note, written in a still more exquisite style."

"You read it, then?" inquired Regnier.

"With much pleasure. The Nouvelle Héloïse, Werther, or the Letters of Jacopo Ortis, are tame by comparison with its glowing ardour. What spirit!—what fire!—what poetry! He who wrote that note, must be a man of no ordinary merit; and it only depends upon me to place him in the position to which he is so justly entitled."

With the easy assurance of a man inured to such perplexities, the Baron succeeded in pacifying the indignation he had seen flashing in the eyes of the poet; and with a placid smile upon his own lips, he paused for the reply of Regnier: who seemed uncertain whether to accept the exaggerated compliments of his foe, or resent them as an impertinence. The poet finally inclined towards the latter;

and the idea of being mystified, served to increase his resentment.

"Sir," said he casting a ferocious look upon the Baron; "I know your genius for satire; but the moment is ill chosen. I am not come here to waste my time in buffoonery, but for a serious explanation. You confess to have been in possession of a letter, of which I am the author; where is it? I desire it may be instantly restored."

"Compose yourself, and listen to me," replied the master of the house. "You are now angry! I hope soon to convince you that, far from laughing at your expense, I have rendered you an essential service. Allow me to state the facts. You are, or think yourself, in love with Madame Colonge. I am the friend of her husband; in which capacity, how was I to act, chance having placed the letter in my power? To allow it to reach its address, would have been to betray Colonge. To return it to you, would not have determined

you to cancel it, and write no more. To burn it, would have been an act of Vandalism. In this dilemma, I decided upon a measure of which you will admit the advantage; since it conciliates the duties of friendship, the respect due to the transcendant qualities of Madame Colonge, and the interests of your literary fame, in which, believe me, I am profoundly concerned. Poets are rare, and I see in *you*, the stuff of which poets are made!"

Livernais paused to watch the expression of Regnier's face. Fumes of indignation still obscured the brain of the poet; but they were overpowered by the odour of the Baron's incense. His countenance still wearing the frown of indignation, as well as the blush of vanity, resembled those masks of the carnival which cry with one side the face, and laugh with the other.

"Do you not consider Madame de Gabriel a charming woman?" replied the Baron, in a soothing voice.

"Madame de Gabriel?" exclaimed the poet in confusion.

"Were I to tell you that her admiration of your style borders upon enthusiasm, were I to tell you that she deems you the first writer of the day, were I to tell you that she reads and re-reads your letter a hundred times a day, what would you reply?"

"That nothing can be more absurd than the enthusiasm of a withered old woman! But I cannot think you serious. What can you mean by such mockery?"

"It is the simple truth."

"Then your treachery to both is unpardonable."

"Why unpardonable? The letter addressed by you to Aurélie Colonge, was forwarded to Aurélie de Gabriel. Not a day passes, but much greater blunders occur at the post-office."

This explicit declaration only served to increase the exasperation of Regnier, who stood

twisting his hat with rage. At length he addressed the Baron in a calm and imposing voice.

"Sir," said he, "you have given the explanation I solicited. I have only one more favour to ask, which is, that you will settle the preliminaries of the meeting which you must perceive to be inevitable."

Already resolved upon fighting with Monsieur La Berthonie, whose conduct appeared to him, most offensive, the Baron was averse to meeting the poet, against whom he had no feeling of resentment; for though a duel may be gratifying in a moment of anger, it is revolting in cold blood, and when unnecessary. A man of the world, and fearing ridicule above every thing, the Baron did not relish the idea of going out with an ill washed, ill combed, ill dressed literary scrub, which would expose him to the ridicule of society; so that far from taking offence at the provocation, he assumed a most pacific smile.

"Grant me only two minutes' attention," said he, calmly. "If you still persist in fighting, we will fight. But before resorting to that extremity, let me explain the motives of my conduct; and let us talk of yourself. Glory is your object, is it not? You are conscious of possessing powerful talents? You feel the germ of genius within you;—you recognise the eagle's egg described by Victor Hugo. What would be the influence on your career, of the passion real orimaginary you have conceived for Madame Colonge? Most disastrous! I do not allude to the perils or obstacles to be overcome, for they exalt the imagination. Madame Colonge is a virtuous and devoted wife, and it would be impossible to seduce her from her duties."

"There is no such word as impossible in the French language," interrupted the poet.

"Good! granted if you will! But let us suppose that you have surmounted all obstacles, and that Madame Colonge loves you.—

You see, I suppose the best. What will be the result?—Happy, or otherwise, your passion will get the better of your genius. You are not aware of the profound egotism of woman's heart. She will love you for her own sake, not for your's. She will absorb your thoughts, your time, your existence. So far from urging you in the path to glory, she will try to clip the wings of your ambition. If you write verses, they must be for her alone. Talk to her of posterity, and she will reply to you by mere matter of fact, that will enervate by degrees the energies of your soul. You will waste your whole literary talent in amorous correspondence; and some day or other, when you seek the inventive faculties with which you are by nature gifted, you will be surprised to find them extinguished. Thus failing in your destiny, instead of becoming a poet of eminence, you will live and die a mere love-sick swain. You will console yourself, it is true, with the love of a very pretty woman,

*while it lasts;* but will such compensation, *always* suffice?—Will you not, like me, reflect bitterly, that there is not a woman in the world worth the sacrifice of talents such as yours?"—

Monsieur de Livernais addressed the poet with such an appearance of sincere and profound conviction, that though at first impatient, he ended by lending an attentive ear. Subdued in spite of himself, the poet, forgetting his woes, attempted to refute the arguments of his wily adversary.

"Your observations," said he, "merit some attention; but they are applicable to other women, besides the one of whom we speak."

"By no means, my dear friend. That enchanting torment called woman, though vain, capricious, selfish and despotic in the first blush of youth, and apt when in all the glory of her beauty, greatly to exaggerate the power of her charms, becomes affectionate

and conciliating some years later, and faithful and devoted at a period when, less confident in her charms, she sees the necessity of making well-timed concessions. Constitutional monarchy follows absolute power. After being a slave, man may become master—if he choose. He then enjoys consideration, is flattered, cared for, and finds his ideas and tastes approved and adopted. Were it possible, the world would be placed at his feet. Sweet and precious, is the affection of a clever and amiable woman, still young, but not *too* young. Madame de Gabriel, for instance, for we must return to her, is one of those beings uniting every quality worthy the regard of a man of superior mind."

"But she is so old!" exclaimed the poet, "forty at least."

"Mere calumny! She is only thirty-eight, and has a right to proclaim herself only thirty —the age in fashion."

"But she is downright ugly!"

"Her beauty is not of a high order; but her physiognomy is highly piquant."

"Thanks to rouge, and false eye-brows."

"What matters the cause, if the effect be good?"

"Not much. But she is so deficient in mind."

"What ingratitude! A woman who rates your poetry higher than that of Lamartine, or Victor Hugo!"

"Does she, indeed?" inquired Regnier.

"And proclaims her opinion in all societies! For your own sake, cherish such a friend. She is more important than you imagine. You possess talent which ought to see the day; nor must you hide your light under a bushel. On the contrary, you must have a stage—a rostrum—a pedestal. At Madame de Gabriel's, you will find all this. She is rich, influential, and receives most of the leading men of the day, as well as the most fashionable women.

From such a stage, you will rise to fame, like a balloon to the sky. The friends of the Viscountess will be your champions. Your success has became a matter of personal importance to her; and she will move heaven and earth to serve you. Pampering the cerberi of criticism till you are distinguished by the leading journals, your own fame will then secure you wealth and immortality."

The Baron paused to take breath; and the suspension was well timed, for in the hearts and heads of embryo authors, there is a feeling prevalent over all others, even that of love.

For six months had Felicien Regnier carried about in his pocket his manuscript carefully tied up with pink ribbon like an infant on the day of its christening, seeking the literary godfather called an editor; an all but imaginary being for a beginner. At sight of a new name subscribed to a new work, a publisher invariably takes fright. The "Dews and Mists" of Felicien, had experienced the destiny

of other virgin inspirations. Not one of the Parisian booksellers had dared to risk the printing this new effort of genius. Rejected on all sides, and menaced with eternal obscurity, Regnier relapsed from the most daring illusions into abject despair, and had already began to deem himself an injured genius.

The words of the Baron sounded in his ears, much as to those of a despairing old maid, the announcement of some officious friend, that a good match is awaiting her consent. Faithless to the bright eyes of Madame Colonge, the poet bestowed a moment's thought upon the Viscountess; who, through the magic words, critics, and an "editor," became in his eyes, clever—pretty—almost young. On the other hand, he took a fresh view of the conduct of Monsieur de Livernais.

"His proceedings were strange, and incon-

siderate," thought he; "but his intention may have been good; and in acting thus he thought to serve me."

"Well!" exclaimed the Baron, watching the effect of his eloquence upon the countenance of the young poet, "have I injured you, or advanced your interest?"

"Advanced your own, perhaps," replied Regnier.

"In what way?"

"You have got rid of a rival."

"Do you fancy then, *I* am in love with Madame Colonge? What folly."

"Folly, or not, it is a fact! I have it from good authority."

"I bet a thousand to one, that La Berthonie is the author of this calumny—this absurdity. If you choose to believe the assertions of a Gascon, he will make you fancy you see the stars at mid-day. I, the intimate friend of Colonge, in love

with his wife? an old man in love with a woman of twenty? You must be out of your senses. It is true, the other day I played you a schoolboy trick; but if you choose, it may be turned to your own advantage."

Regnier paused. During the preceding dialogue, his resentment had melted away like wax exposed to the sun; though a feeling of wounded vanity prevented his immediately accepting the advice of Monsieur de Livernais.

"Sir," said he, "this discussion has taken so unforeseen a turn, that I would reflect before I decide. I must consult a friend, who enjoys all my confidence. Allow me to postpone till to-morrow my definitive reply."

"As you please," said the Baron with a smile. "You will find my opinion unalterable; never can I allow so fine a genius as yours, to remain unknown."

Gratified by this last compliment, the poet bid the Baron adieu, in a manner far from hostile.

"This requires reflection," thought he, on his way home to his lodgings. "Aurélie is really charming, and I love her as woman was never loved. But if it be true that my passion is a rock upon which my genius must be wrecked, have I a right to accomplish such a suicide?—There is some truth in what the Baron says. He affirms that the Viscountess is only thirty-eight;—at that age a woman is not so very old. Ninon de l'Enclos, Diane de Poitiers, and many other illustrious beauties, have inspired passions at nearly double the age."

In the active imagination of the poet, the Beatrix of five and forty, was gradually usurping the throne of the Beatrix of twenty; thanks to the important question of a publisher, so dexterously raised by the Baron; who, on

getting rid of his importunate visitor, returned in all haste to the artist; where, however, another ordeal awaited him more conclusive than all the rest.

## CHAPTER XI.

The result of the day's work had been on the whole favourable to Monsieur de Livernais, who, from three critical positions had adroitly extricated himself. As regarded the artist, and the poet, he felt himself secure. In the case of Monsieur La Berthonie, it is true, things looked more serious. But the Baron was little moved by the prospect; the tongue of the corpulent gentleman being more active than his sword.

"Yesterday, I gave him a lesson in the noble art of riding," said he; "to-morrow, he shall have one in that of fencing."

The prospect of a duel is sometimes a cause of excitement, rather than depression. By nature far from timid, the countenance of Monsieur de Livernais evinced an unusual degree of daring, and self assurance; and his very manner of dashing among the carts, omnibuses and carriages of all kinds, announced a man who knew no impediment to his will. The Baron found the door of the studio closed.

"How fortunate that he should be gone out!" was his immediate reflection.

On being announced in the drawing-room, his wishes were gratified; Madame Colonge was alone, seated on a sofa, near the fire, apparently plunged in profound reflection. Such was her preoccupation, that she was not aware of any one entering the room.

The Baron paused for a moment, then gently approached Aurélie.

"Here is the album I promised you, Ma-

dame," said he; "I should have been here sooner, had I not been detained by an importunate visitor."

Aurélie accepted the book, and laid it upon the table.

"I have seen my husband's picture," said she, casting a resentful look at the Baron.

"You fancy, of course, that I wished to deceive you. But I swear, that the head in question, existed only yesterday. I saw it with my eyes."

"I saw it this morning," replied Aurélie, with suppressed indignation.

A gleam of satisfaction brightened the face of the Baron; and taking a chair, he sat down beside his fascinating friend.

"Since I am your confidant," said he, in a persuasive voice, "you will surely tell me all. No one could listen with more sincere, or more absolute devotion. What has happened?"

"A mere trifle," replied she, bitterly smiling. "My husband saw that the head displeased me, and effaced it."

"He really made that sacrifice? I admit that it must have cost something to the pride of an artist. Still more so to the heart of a lover."

"You fancy then, that he still loves that woman?"

"I may have been wrong," replied the Baron, artfully. "But you insisted on knowing my opinion; I wished to spare your feelings."

"You suppose me weaker than I really am. Learn," replied Aurélie haughtily, "that I have energy sufficient to listen to truths, however cruel. Other women, in my position, would faint—talk of dying—melt into tears. But I will endure all with calmness and fortitude. When convinced of possessing my husband's affections, I felt the deepest devotion in return. But now that he has ceased to love

me, I should despise myself, were I to persist in loving him. This change in my feelings surprises me. I did not think myself so determined or so revengeful. While in doubt, I suffered much; now that I doubt no more, affliction is at an end."

"Patience is a poor comfort," replied the Baron. "Your fortitude, Madam, surprises me."

"Would you have me weep, despair, sink, under my sufferings?" exclaimed Aurélie, with a convulsive laugh. "Would you have me become the victim of one who deceives and injures me?"

"No, no! I am not such a wretch! I should deserve your scorn, and that of the world."

"On the contrary, you would ensure its sympathy."

"Pity would be the worst evil of all. Am I so old, or so ugly, as to create feelings of compassion. Monsieur le Baron, if I thought you pitied me, I would never forgive you."

"But what if your injuries inspired me with a sentiment far, far more tender, more devoted than pity. Would you pardon me?" said he, gradually approaching her.

"Where pardon is required," replied Madame Colonge, "offence must have been intended.'

Throughout the interview, the Baron perceiving the excited state of the indignant wife, had judged it a fitting opportunity for making some demonstration of his views; and now he chose to arm himself with his most invincible look of fascination.

"You speak of offence!" whispered he, in his most pathetic tone of voice. "Is it thus you would interpret the profoundest sympathy, the most sincere devotion, the most fervent tenderness, or, in one word, a love such as woman never before inspired."

"You really love me then?" inquired Madame Colonge.

"To madness!" replied Livernais, who, on

seeing a smile on the lips of Aurélie, began to anticipate an easy victory over her affections. The Baron being fifty years of age, and naturally of the old school of gallantry, judged it necessary to make his declaration on his knees. Prostrating himself on the carpet, with all the seeming respect in which his heart was deficient, Aurélie did more than smile, she laughed outright.

"Who wins?" she inquired of her husband, who meanwhile had stole up behind the Baron.

Astonished at a question not addressed to himself, the superannuated gallant following the eyes of Madame Colonge, abruptly turned round ;— when, finding the artist gazing at him, with his usual imperturbable demeanour, he started up, and seized his hat with the precipitation of a man uncertain whether he is to make his exit by the door, or the window.

"Where are you going?" said Colonge, with

a smile as calm as it was ironical. "Pray take a seat, I have neither dagger nor pistol about me."

But a thing the Baron dreaded more than such weapons, was ridicule!

"If I retreat now, this will be my field of Waterloo!" thought he; and mustering all his energy and courage, he accepted the proffered chair.

"I know not what may be the game!" said he, with a grimace, purporting to be a smile. "All I know is, that I am a loser."

"You are not the only one," said Aurélie, looking archly at her husband.

"Too true, Baron! I am your companion in misfortune!" said Colonge, with perfect equanimity. "Allow me to explain all this; or, in spite of your sagacity, it will be difficult to understand our manœuvres. Know that the scene in which you have just figured as Tartuffe, is of my wife's devising, who seems to have justly relied upon your docility and elo-

quence. To make the scene perfect, like Orgon, I should have been concealed under the table, but I chose to listen at the door. The position is less dramatic, it is true; but unaccustomed, like yourself, to act upon my knees, I was less exact in my part. A man can but do his best."

"Or a woman either," exclaimed Aurélie, laughing maliciously. "Say, Baron! was not my performance of an indignant wife tolerable for a first attempt?"

"The Baron was the best actor of us all!" observed the artist. "There was something sublime in his 'You speak of offence.'"

"I prefer the emphasis of his 'to madness!'" cried Aurélie, mimicking the tone of the disappointed gallant.

"And his genuflection was worthy of his eloquence!" continued Colonge.

"In the last century, it was the fashion to swear eternal fidelity on your knees;" observed

Aurélie, with playful derision. "A man can but do his best."

During this process of slow torture, the Baron sat defenceless in his chair. Not a word could he find in the way of retort; and in spite of his efforts to smile, he was no better than a spiked gun.

"I must now," resumed the artist, in the same vein of irony, "explain to you the programme of our little drama. You know how I scorned the hints of La Berthonie, and refused to believe in your passion for my wife. Aurélie is more credulous. Instead of admiring the system of Matrimonial Police, by which I established you as her guardian, she persisted in doubting your sincerity. And when I asserted you to be the most faithful of my friends, in charging you with hypocrisy and perfidy. Our discussion terminated in the English fashion—with a bet."

"Of which I appear to be the victim!" said the Baron, rising abruptly.

All he now hoped, was a safe retreat.

"You are a man of genius," said he to the artist; "but your wife is unluckily as clever as yourself. With equal chances I might still defend myself. But with two to one against me, it is better to submit to defeat. In return for the lesson you have given me, allow me to offer you one counsel. Henceforward, watch over your wife yourself. The eye of a husband is more vigilant than the best Matrimonial Police in the world."

Without waiting for an answer, the Baron bowed and retired.

The advice thus singularly given, seems to have proved auspicious to the happiness of the artist and his wife; for Monsieur and Madame Colonge are now cited as models of domestic felicity. Aurélie, convinced of her injustice, and enlisted in the professional ambitions of her husband, has learned to dispense with the empty triumphs of her own vanity; and,

apprized of the anxieties to which they might give rise, has since conducted herself with such exemplary prudence, and so devoted herself to the pleasures and duties of home, as to render superfluous the intervention of a MATRIMONIAL POLICE.

# DECORUM.

# DECORUM.

## CHAPTER I.

The chief object of a Parisian in his promenades, is to see and be seen; and the places where it is possible to walk without being crushed by the throng, are under sentence of universal contempt. Human beings follow in each other's track, like sheep; and fashion is the dog which barks at the flock and causes them to hustle together.

Among the lounges abandoned for others of less merit, is the Jardin des Plantes. This melancholy garden is situated on the left bank of the Seine, near the Hospital of La Pitié,

the Wine Market, the prison of the National Guard; and vainly do its gates stand invitingly open to the few passengers who traverse the bridge of Austerlitz. Vain are its botanical wonders, vain is the attraction of its well-lodged lions and tigers. With the exception of gaping provincials, or a few Great Britons to whom an excursion on the continent consists rather in a verification more minute than intellectual of the matter contained in Galignani's Hand-book, the frequenters of this scientific resort, are as few and far between as the shipwrecked adventurers, described by Virgil. Old people or invalids covetous of a little sunshine, wandering from bench to bench to escape the shade; the halt, the blind, the dumb, unhappy wretches for whom life hath neither bud nor blossom; nurses and children, who travel with stores of gingerbread from the monkeys to the bears; workmen out of employ, envying the better fate of the beasts, housed and fed gratuitously, are the sole fre-

quenters of this beautiful garden, to which the most deserted spots of the town appear noisy and animated. But though the dispiriting isolation of the Jardin des Plantes may terrify the mere lounger, there is still a class upon whom the common place feeling has but little influence; to which solitude, far from being a cause of disgust, constitutes a first rate attraction.

To this interesting class, probably belonged an individual of about twenty-five years of age, and a female still younger; who, one fresh April morning in 1828, pursued their way along the tortuous paths of the Swiss valley towards the Belvidere. Never had the deer and gazelles browsing in their green enclosures been disturbed by the endearments of so well-matched a couple. The tender air with which the young man pressed the willing arm of his companion, and her modest submission to this mute token of affection, announced a perfect sympathy of feeling.

The very harmony of their gait, and their simplest gestures, betrayed the perfume emanating from that rose of the heart—an innocent attachment. One might have supposed them a newly married couple enjoying the early days of the honeymoon, had not a trifling circumstance negatived the conjecture; the young woman being in mourning, while nothing in the costume of the man announced the uniformity exacted by conjugal custom.

If therefore a considerable intimacy of sentiment was incontestable, its legitimacy was certainly equivocal. Such however was the air of modesty imprinted upon the face of the female, and such the respectful deportment of her friend, that prudery itself must have hesitated to deduce unfavourable conjectures.

They proceeded slowly, occasionally mistaking the way; perhaps intentionally, for there are other truants besides schoolboys, who prefer the longest road. The gentleman amused himself by touching with his cane, the

animals gazing behind their gratings; while the lady seemed to hang upon his arm, with the inertness of a bird, whose buoyant wings remain wilfully closed.

In spite of the pre-occupations of that exclusive sentiment so aptly defined by Madame de Stael, as "egotism for two," anxiety was depicted in the face of the interesting woman, whenever she came in contact with other frequenters of the garden; more especially, those whose dress announced the higher order of society. To avoid them, she would fain have retreated; had not her companion remonstrated with her on the weakness of such conduct.

"Really, Adrienne," said he, after a stronger demonstration of alarm than the rest, "you will drive me wild with your terrors! Do you suppose that your acquaintances of the Rue Taranne will take the trouble of watching us in the Jardin des Plantes? Remember we are as far from Paris here, as if in some forest

in America! Besides, what is there to fear? are you not mistress of your actions? Has any one a right to control them?"

"No one in particular. But the world!" replied the timid young woman. "A widow of twenty relapses into her minority and becomes the ward of the world. In the circle of Madame de Chantevilliers alone, I possess half a dozen self-instituted, officious guardians; who, on the pretext of taking interest in me and my want of experience, beset me with their precepts and advice. Should one of those good people detect me with you at this moment, what would she think or say?"

"What signify their absurdities?"

"Brave them if you will, Adolphe, but *I* must conform to the opinion of society. Be sincere! was it not imprudent of you to entice me out this morning?—I am waiting in fear and trembling the punishment of my indiscretion."

" But, after all, where is the harm of our walk?" inquired Adolphe. " Are we not to be shortly united?"

" Once married, we may walk together as much as we please. You may then experience less inclination for my company."

At this insinuation, the young man pressed her arm tenderly within his own.

" Alone with *you* in a desart!"—whispered he—as became an engaged lover.

They now slackened their pace absorbed in mutual happiness; silent, but expressing their feelings by mutual pressure of the arm. Had a well at that moment lain in their path, they would have fallen into it, like the astrologer in the fable! Fortunately, their aberrations, instead of provoking such a catastrophe, led them only into contact with an elderly gentleman, as absent as themselves, who stood entranced before a brood of web-footed Muscovy ducks, to which he was paternally throwing pieces of cake.

This amiable naturalist was attired in a long skirted chocolate-coloured great coat, at one of the button holes of which figured the ribbon of the Legion of Honour; and on finding himself hustled by the dreamy couple, he hastily turned round his yellow weazened face, the pointed termination of which strongly recalled the muzzle of a jackal, or the well-known feature of Robespierre. His deep set eyes, half concealed by thick and grizzly eyebrows, shot forth a penetrating glance; which, after indiscreetly scrutinizing the interior of the lady's hat, fixed upon her admirer with the most ironical expression of surprise. On recognizing the individual he had stumbled against, he touched his hat, and mumbled a few words of apology. Adolphe, meanwhile, blushed to the eyes; for the old gentleman, without listening, looked again towards Adrienne with more curiosity than respect, and walked away, still casting furtive glances at the young couple.

"Who is that gentleman, and why do you blush?" inquired Adrienne of her admirer.

"More alarms?"—replied he, striving to conceal his confusion. "Your perpetual fear put me out of countenance."

"But who is that man?"—

"The one of all our acquaintance whom we have the least to fear. He remarked my stupid confusion, and I have no doubt is much diverted; for in spite of the unsophisticated amusement in which we surprised him, he is more malicious than all the apes in the garden put together! It is an old friend of my family, who on several occasions has evinced real proofs of interest in my favour. In fact, it is the chief clerk of the Home Department, of whom I have already spoken—Monsieur Sabathier.

"The Monsieur Sabathier who procured your appointment for you?"—

"The same! and the more kindly, that our political opinions differ—if, indeed, he have an opinion; for he has been in office these thirty years, and was the right hand of Mon-

sieur Martignac, after having been a favourite of Monsieur Villèle."

"Such a man ought to have more opinions than one!" said Adrienne, laughing.

"You are severe."

"No! Monsieur Sabathier is your patron, and as such, must be respected, in spite of his withered face and malicious looks. The place he has been the means of procuring you, brings in three thousand francs per annum, which make an important figure in our budget. Without it, what would become of us! It is precisely those three thousand francs that will enable us to live comfortably."

"With true affection, one always lives comfortably," observed the more sentimental Adolphe.

"Love in a cottage!" said the young widow, with a smile. "Spendthrift! it becomes *you* to talk so! I am well acquainted with your follies. You are ruining yourself in furnishing your bachelor's apartment in the Rue Gaillon."

" Where, in three months, I trust we shall be living together !" added Adolphe.

" I have heard of your silk hangings and inlaid furniture—your bronzes, porcelain, and pictures. Is that what you call a cottage ? Well, well ! it is time I should take the reins of government into my hands. I almost think I had better assume them before our wedding-day."

" Are you not already my guide and ruler ? —What are your commands ?"

" In the first place, a financial measure which will disgust you ;—that you pay no bills before I have examined them. You allow yourself to be robbed without remonstrance."

" I see you will not allow me the privilege of surprising you !"

" Surprise me by being reasonable ; and since I am in a scolding humour, listen to a word more. You have been seen running from jeweller to jeweller !—Take notice that, with the exception of a plain gold wedding-ring, I will

accept nothing in the way of ornament. I have a few diamonds; when we are rich, you shall give me more; till then—nothing! Disobey me not, or I shall be seriously offended. I am young and pretty enough, I flatter myself, to want nothing but flowers."

"Till I knew you, dearest Adrienne, I never desired to be rich," said he, in a melancholy tone.

"Just now, you were talking of cottages," said she, "and now, you are dreaming of palaces!"

"Is it not cruel to possess nothing worthy of you?"

"I thought you possessed a heart"—whispered Adrienne, looking tenderly towards him.

While thus conversing together, they arrived at the Belvidere. The east wind was blowing with the usual equinoxial violence; and Adrienne, shivering in her shawl, seized the arm of her future husband with childish impetu-

osity, exclaiming—" I am dying with cold;—let us run down the hill!"—

They rushed, accordingly, down the spiral paths, bordered with lilacs; and urged by the rapid declivity of the ground, descended from top to bottom in joyous mirth, unable to check themselves; when lo! they suddenly found themselves in collision with a group of people about to ascend the mount. It was composed of several women, whose air and dress were somewhat provincial, escorted by two youths, of twelve or thirteen, attired in jackets; and both the ladies and boys seemed to acknowledge the authority of one of the party differing, in all points, from themselves.

It was a woman of about eight-and-thirty, of regular beauty, but tall and stately, carrying her head haughtily. Her black satin pelisse, trimmed with chinchilla, displayed a figure which, though distinguished, was not free from stiffness; while her velvet hat, with its plumes floating in the wind, sat upon her head

as superbly as Minerva's helmet on the forehead of the goddess.

This woman, whose fierce and haughty eye announced far greater self-esteem than sympathy for her fellow creatures, seemed born to wear the ruff and farthingale of former times. In witnessing her majestic bearing, and the studied calculation of her most insignificant gestures, one might have imagined a tragedy queen or high priestess of the opera, retaining her theatrical solemnity of the stage in private life. But upon closer inspection, such a supposition appeared inapplicable to her severe and rigid physiognomy.

On finding herself all but in the arms of this imposing-looking person, the young woman suddenly halted, with the nervous impatience of an Arab courser. Blushing to the eyes, she dropped the arm of Adolphe, and making a violent effort to smile,—"What a surprise, Madam, to meet you here!" said she, in a faltering voice.

To avoid the threatened collision, the haughty stranger had retired a few paces, with her hands defensively held out. Instead of answering, she cast a deliberate glance upon Adrienne, which she next transferred to the features of the young man, who was unknown to her; then, contracting her lips and brows as if beholding some hideous monster, she turned away her head, and pursued her way—a movement scrupulously imitated by those who accompanied her.—As they departed, Adolphe replaced his hat on his head.

"You seem to have recognised some provincial bores?"—said he, leaning towards his beloved. "But what ails you?—You are confused and trembling!"—

"Come, dear Adolphe, come!—they are returning," replied the young widow, stepping out hastily, as if to avoid being seen a second time by the group, whose ironical chatterings already reached her ears.

"Oh! how she looked at me, Adolphe! Did you observe her?"—

"Does she know you, then?" exclaimed her admirer, impetuously. "Why when you spoke, she was rude enough neither to answer nor return your bow!—And to think that there is nobody with her whom I can chastise for her impertinence!"—

Involuntarily, he brandished his cane, as if he held a sword in his hand; but on perceiving only two jacketed youths upon whom to exercise his indignation, he shrugged his shoulders in contempt.

"What is the woman's name?"—he contemtuously inquired. "I have seen her either at the Opera, or at Franconi's, amongst the figurantes."

In spite of this scornful allusion, Adrienne continued to muse in thoughtful silence.

"What is the matter, dearest?" inquired her admirer, assuming a kinder tone. "What

have I done? —Am *I* accountable for the impertinence of that hateful woman?—Speak to me—speak, dear Adrienne!"

"I am not angry," said she, offering her hand; "but you have made me wretched!"

"Wretched!—*I?*"—

"Yes, *you!* How right I was to refuse to go out this morning!—But how was I to persevere when you persisted? I knew this walk would end unfortunately! Thanks to this adventure, I shall become the theme of a merciless, scandalous, and intolerant côterie. A mere trifle will be construed into an act of indecorum. I see from hence the sneers and looks of those of whom you have just now had a specimen!"

"Because an ugly old woman chooses to be impertinent, you fancy the universe in league agai nst you!"

"She is not old, being only forty; and her beauty is beyond dispute. You would fain flatter my indignation—but you are wrong.

I am not blind; and were she hideous, and a great-grandmother, her influence in the world would not be the less important."

"Who is she, then?—One would imagine her the Dauphiness, by the importance you assign her!"

"It is the Countess de Chantevilliers!—The question could only issue from the courts of law, or the Faubourg St. Jacques!" replied the pretty widow. "Did you oftener emerge into our circle, I should not be obliged to explain to you the value of a name you now hold so cheap. The Countess de Chantevilliers is the woman, like Bayard, *sans peur et sans reproche*—an immaculate angel, who soars superior to human frailties; the queen of all the drawing-rooms she deigns to honour with her presence; the arbitress of taste, talent, and reputation; in fact, the Virtue in fashion!"—

"Because to be virtuous happens, just now, to be fashionable at court," observed Adolphe, smiling.

" Her enemies (and who is without them ?) pronounce her, it is true, addicted to scandal, disdainful, and selfish. She is accused of a severity towards others, exceeded only by her own self-indulgence. Could she kneel in adoration of her perfections, they say she would become a double devotee. But these minor failings are, to a certain degree, supportable; for she is really so superior to most of us, that she has the right to assert her pre-eminence.—I need not tell you that she holds all men in contempt, and most women.—You have seen "*La Vestale ?*"—It is Madame de Chantevilliers who acts the high priestess, and throws the black veil over the heads of those convicted of imprudence. A phrase, a word from *her*, and a lapse of mere decorum insures one's being buried alive like Julia. I am persuaded, that she is already preparing my obsequies !" continued the young widow. " From our being together, she will deduce the most absurd inferences. But I will not await the fatal

sentence. I will proceed to her without delay, and explain that you are about to become my husband."

"How! you would enter that woman's house, after such insolence?" exclaimed Adolphe, involuntarily. "You would do no good, Adrienne; and, since in your eyes I have now a husband's influence, let me entreat you to disregard the malice of this Madame de Chantevilliers. In three months, you will be Madame Dauriac. Despise, therefore, the strictures of the chattering old gossip, (for your immaculate angel is nothing else!) and promise me not to humiliate yourself by such a visit."

"I cannot promise, dear Adolphe. I will not subject myself to vexation so easily avoided by a mere explanation. Why make an enemy of so formidable a personage?"—

"But she insulted you?"—

"Because appearances were against me;—a reason the more for clearing up the error. Besides, the other day, she sent me an invita-

tion for a ball; and though my mourning prevents my availing myself of it, I owe her a visit."

In this discussion, each adhered to their original opinion. Before it ended, they found themselves arrived at the apartment of Madame de Versan, in the Rue Taranne. Adolphe Dauriac remained there the greater part of the afternoon, according to his custom; when lo! just as he was retiring, a strange servant was ushered into the room by the female attendant of the young widow.

"Do you wish to speak to me?" inquired Adrienne, much agitated on perceiving the livery of Madame de Chantevilliers.

"It is about a letter, Madam," stammered the footman, evidently distressed; "a letter I brought some days ago—an invitation to a ball. —I suppose there was an error, for my mistress wishes to have it back again."

Adrienne rose, and taking the letter from her desk, gave it, without observation, to the servant.

"And *now* do you mean to visit her?"—inquired Dauriac, trembling with rage, when they were again alone. Then, after jumping from his seat, and impatiently pacing the room, he suddenly stood before Adrienne.

"Has that woman a husband?"—said he.

"Certainly," replied Madame de Versan.

"What age is he?"—

"Sixty, I believe."

"I thought so—an old man! This morning it was boys, and now a lackey! But this woman must surely have others about her—a brother—a friend—an admirer—some one who is accountable for the insolence of her pretensions?" Furious with indignation, he gesticulated with his hand in so menacing an attitude, as nearly to demolish the clock upon the chimney piece.

The warmth with which he was disposed to resent the affront to his beloved, seemed to appease her more than any mere form of consolation.

" Compose yourself, dearest," said she, forcing him into a chair. " The injury is not of a nature to be resented sword in hand;—our marriage is the best answer to all calumnious suppositions. For I need not deceive myself! The Countess will not stop at the truth.—What my offence to her, I cannot imagine."

" Look at yourself in the glass, Adrienne, and you will know."

" A compliment and not a reason! Besides she is better looking than I am, and fully aware of it. No! her conduct, in this instance, is not the result of a personal pique; but arises from the rigidity of her principles.—These strait-laced women have neither pity nor generosity. To act upon a mere surmise—to believe in appearances rather than the attestation of my whole life!—to condemn me without a hearing, an inquiry—to treat me with such gratuitous brutality! For she is aware that my mourning would prevent my going to the ball; and all

for the mere pleasure of insulting me! For she has now shut her doors upon me, Adolphe!"

Madame de Versan, who had been looking towards her admirer, suddenly turned away her head, to conceal her tears of indignation. When Adolphe perceived them, his rage became ungovernable.

"She has made you weep, Adrienne, and I swear to you, she shall weep in her turn!" cried he. "It is for me to avenge you, and avenged you shall be! You told me just now that she had an aged husband.—What is he?—What is position in the world?"

"What signifies his position?"

"Answer me, I beg of you?—Do they reside in Paris?—Chantevilliers!—Surely the name is familiar to me!"—

"In the journals, perhaps—Monsieur de Chantevilliers is a deputy."

"A deputy?—good! He does not belong to the left, for I know them all."

" He belongs to the centre," said the young widow. " Every thing that is most centre under Decazes and Monsieur de Villèle; and he will most likely see out Monsieur de Martignac. It is all one to him. He attaches himself to the administration, not the ministers. In fact, he is a pattern of a deputy. Never in his life has he soiled his fingers with a black ball."

" What is his department?"—

" Bordeaux, where he is President of the Royal court.—But he generally inhabits Paris, where, being rich, he keeps open house."

" From Bordeaux!"—exclaimed Dauriac. " Enough! the rest depends upon me. I know a person who will give me every information upon the subject. To-morrow, I will ascertain whether this irreproachable lady be as invulnerable as you pronounce her. With regard to angels, Adrienne, I have only faith in *you!* Upon looking closer, I may probably detect a

flaw in the diamond;—and she shall then learn the price of your tears."

"And who is the magician, you mean to consult?" asked Madame de Versan.

"One of my friends, a man of character and courage, whom you know by reputation—Groscassand of the Gironde."

"Groscassand?—Who on earth is he?" inquired Adrienne, with a smile.

Adolphe looked grave on seeing the comic effect produced by the patronymic of his friend.

"I will not reply, as you did this morning, that it savours of the courts of law, to be ignorant. But I have a right to say that it is a question worthy the frivolity of your sex! Groscassand is one of the most promising deputies of the chamber, destined probably to succeed to Foy and Manuel. *He* does not belong to the centre!—He is a true liberal, and—"

"Remember, I do not allow politics! Besides, it is five o'clock."

Dauriac rose ;—and having exhausted the endless leave-taking of lovers, preparatory to a separation which is to last till the following day, he quitted the room.

END OF VOL. II.

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